

JOY *and* **PAM**
at **BROOKSIDE**

JOY AND PAM AT BROOKSIDE

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"Joy and Pam," "Joy and Gypsy
Joe," Etc.



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JOY AND PAM AT BROOKSIDE

CHAPTER I

JOY AND JOE

PAM was having the last fitting on a challis dress in the sewing room. Her mother and Miss Bride, with her mouth full of pins, were discussing the length and Pam was gazing at herself in the long mirror that hung on one side of the wall.

"I'm not exactly pretty; my hair is much too red," she decided as she looked at the brilliant mop of glorious red hair and wished it was a light taffy color.

But Pam was pretty with a glowing prettiness, her delicate lids veiled eyes of a sapphire blue that danced to the tune of sheer happiness.

Joy poked her nose in the door and grinned.

"I'm going out," she said. "I'll meet you down at the old stone wall."

"Oh, wait for me," Pam said, wriggling

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around so that she could look over her shoulder.

"No, it's too glorious a day to stay indoors," Flora Hotchkiss said very decidedly. "Run on Joy, and Pam, dear, please do stand still."

"All right, go, but don't let anything exciting happen till I get there," Pam called for Joy was already down the hall.

There were people in Birchwood who said Joy was pretty only when she was grubby and indeed a smudge of dirt across her face did not detract from her elfin prettiness. When her hair was tousled and damp it fell in soft ringlets. It was dark brown and had a hint of gold through it when the sunshine fell on it. Her eyes were brown, too, with flecks of gold and they had the velvety softness of dead autumn leaves in color. Her expression was her chief charm for she had a roguish look that had not changed from babyhood that had been spent with the happy gypsies who had allowed her impishness to have full sway. They had taught her, too, to understand animals and people so that she rode superbly, was afraid of no dog alive and always knew what the other person was thinking. Thus equipped

Joy faced the battle of life with a smile that almost equaled Pam's in happiness.

To-day she had many things to think about. Brookside, the one and only boarding school, was to open in a week and there was lots to be done in the meantime.

"Guess I'll say good-by to the old gypsy camp. Funny they didn't come back this year but I suppose it's on account of Joe."

She walked across the fields to the wagon road that ran at the back of the old Payton place. Honor Hare saw her from an upstairs window and waved a greeting.

The day was warm and clear with soft little clouds that played tag across the face of the sun blotting it out for a minute and casting queer shadows on the ground.

The leaves of the birch trees were a soft yellow and the rest of the woods flamed scarlet.

Joy walked along with her head down, thinking of many things. She was forgetting the gypsies and she didn't want to for even though Mother Ia was dead there was still Luibo and Persa. But the question that bothered her most was, where was Joe?

Suddenly a bird's song came to her from the direction of the old wall and she stopped to

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listen. Then she ran forward eagerly but stopped in surprise at the sight that met her eyes.

Joe was sitting on the wall, that is if this citified looking boy could possibly be Joe. Gone were the old frayed trousers and the red sash and the torn old shirt that opened at the neck, and, oh! gone were the brown legs and the bruised, bare feet. In their place were tan shoes and stockings and a neat norfolk jacket suit and white shirt and tie.

The tangled hair was cut close to the well shaped head. Only the eyes remained the same.

"Joe," Joy exclaimed, "where have you come from and what is the matter with you?"

"I am a gajo now, Joy and I have to dress like one," Joe said simply.

"Did the Colonel buy you those clothes?" Joy demanded, for the suit was cheap and somehow did not look like the Colonel.

"No, I bought it myself and I have saved fifty dollars which I will give to the Colonel for my schooling," said Joe grandly.

"Oh, Joe, how did you make it and do tell me what you have been doing since I last saw you?" begged Joy.

"I have been many places," said Joe with a sigh, "but I have learned that down inside I am a gajo and, oh, Joy, all gypsies are not like ours. Some of them have learned to be wicked and false to all gypsy teaching and nowhere did I find the equal of Liubo and Mother Ia."

"Of course not," said Joy in a matter of fact tone, "but don't let's waste any more time. Let's go straight to the Colonel's and see how pleased he'll be."

"See my violin," said Joe. "Sasha gave it to me, but you are right, no more gypsies and now for the Colonel," and he wrapped his violin up in a red silk handkerchief and tucked it under his arm.

They met Pam as they sauntered along. She had heard voices and was hurrying to see what it was all about.

"Well, for mercy's sake," she exclaimed, "do look who's here."

Joe didn't like Pam very much but he knew Joy loved her so he said "hello" and stopped to shake hands.

Pam had a million questions to ask.

"Where did you come from? Where are you going? Are you really going to be an

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ordinary person like us? Aren't you glad?"

Joe looked at her in dismay. "Pam," he said quietly, "you talk too much."

"Why Joe, she does not," Joy protested all in one breath. "Oh, dear, why don't you two like each other?" she continued sadly. "I'll have to make you somehow for I won't have you fussing all the time, it would be just too horrid."

"I want to be friends but Joe won't," Pam said slowly.

Joe looked from one to the other and sighed. What he wanted was impossible for he wanted Joy all to himself as it had been and the freedom of the gypsy life where they could roam the world over and be happy. But he knew now that Joy would not be content any more to call to the birds for a whole afternoon; she was truly a gajo and with a sudden start he remembered that he was, too.

"All right," he said good-naturedly, "we'll all be friends and if Pam promises not to tumble off her horse I'll like her."

"Why," said Pam indignantly, "I never fall off Clinker."

"Are you still afraid of your father's horse?" demanded Joe.

Pam was above all things truthful but she wanted to fib now.

"Yes, I am," she said at last.

Joe laughed.

"Are you still afraid of the collie at the crossroads where we stole the jam the night Persa was married?" Joy asked impishly.

And Joe laughed again, this time at himself.

"That is fair, Joy, I suppose," he said.

"Then call it square and shake hands," Joy begged and they stopped in the road and took each other's hand sheepishly.

"Now that peace is declared," said Joy, "I'll race you to the Colonel's."

"But Joy, I can't race in these shoes," Joe protested, "wait till I take them off."

"No, you have got to arrive at the Colonel's with shod feet," replied Joy, "so we'll walk sedately."

They found the Colonel in his garden tying up tomato vines. Joy sent Joe on ahead and she and Pam waited in the background. The Colonel looked up from his task and straightened his shoulders, then he saw Joe.

"So you've come back, my boy," he said gruffly.

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"Yes, sir," said Joe, standing on first one foot and then the other.

"Well, mind there are to be no more runnings away," the Colonel went on. "I'll take you to town to-morrow and see about fitting you out and," he stopped, "who gave you that suit?" he demanded.

"I, myself," said Joe. "I worked in a restaurant and made the money and here, here are fifty one-dollar bills for my schooling. I must learn and that quickly," he said, as if learning were something that could be finished up in no time.

"That's the right spirit," said the Colonel and now let's go inside and find you a room."

Joy and Pam followed them into the house and up the stairs to a small bedroom with an army cot along one side and a chest of drawers on the other.

"Oh, Colonel, that looks like such an uncomfortable bed," said Pam, prodding it with one finger, "can't he even have a mattress?" She was beginning to feel very sorry for Joe.

"What's the matter with that bed?" stormed the Colonel. "It's just like mine. Mattresses are unhealthy, but, of course, if the boy wants one"—

"No, sir," said Joe quickly, "I like a quilt on the floor best, but now I suppose I must learn to sleep in a bed," he added a little wistfully.

"There, miss," laughed the Colonel, "you women are always fussing. This is a bachelor's house."

"Well," sighed Pam, "I'm glad daddy doesn't make us sleep on a hard old thing like that, aren't you, Joy?"

"I should say I am; I always got as many quilts as I could from Mother Ia when I was living with you, do you remember that, Joe?"

"Yes, in some ways you were always a gajo," teased Joe, and much to his surprise Joy nodded.

They went back to the living room where the Colonel had the floor and desk and walls covered by blueprint drawings of a cannon he was inventing.

"I'll explain what all these mean some other time," he told Joe and swept them on the floor under the desk.

"Colonel," said Joy suddenly, "let's have a party to-night and introduce Joe to all the young people in Birchville."

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The Colonel turned to Joe. "Would you like that?" he asked.

Joe gripped the back of the chair beside him. Not for anything in the world would he admit to being afraid of all these boys and girls. Some of them he had met when he was a gypsy and he liked them, but they had looked at him in a different light then and he knew now that they would size him up as a gajo and he felt very small indeed.

"Yes, have them," he said, "now is the best time."

Joy caught the tragedy in his voice and hastened to comfort him.

"They will like you better because you have been with the gypsies," she said, "and they will like all the things you can do."

"The rest of the world didn't," said Joe, and he laughed grimly at certain painful memories.

Joy and Pam went home full of the party. The Colonel had left it to them to choose the guests.

"I've got a simply heavenly idea," said Pam. "Let's line the kids up and introduce them to Joe one at a time."

Joy considered. "Yes, that will be a good

scheme," she agreed. "It's the crowd he's afraid of."

So that night the guests were lined up on the Colonel's front porch, and inside in the tiny living room Joe stood like a king to receive them.

First came Merry Talcott. Pam ushered her in and turned her over to Joy. Joy introduced her to Joe which was a little out of the ordinary for the boy should always be presented to the girl.

"Joe, this is Merry; you've met before," she said.

"Why, how do you do, Joe? I think this is perfectly heavenly having you here, and I know that Birchville is just thrilled to death. It's a great honor having two gypsies in one town and"—

"Time's up, Merry," said Joy. "If I let you you'd talk all night."

"I expect I would," said Merry, and she tossed her blonde curly head: "well, good-by, see you to-morrow."

Next came Dandy Talcott for as Pam said, "you may as well meet the whole family."

"Hello," said Dandy, "welcome to the fair

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city of Birchville; we know we can't offer you anything that you'll call excitement but you're in on all our modest good times and don't forget that."

"Thank you," said Joe, and he meant it.

Dandy was followed by Spruce.

"Hello, there," he said, "guess my family have talked you deaf, dumb and blind. Merry could talk the brass ear off a monkey."

"I liked Merry," said Joe simply and Spruce's hand shot out again.

"Tell you a secret," he said, "so do I and from now on we're pals."

There was a slight delay because the Root twins decided to come in together.

"Hello," said Ted, "glad you're back."

"So am I," agreed Bob, "and when we come back Thanksgiving we'll initiate you into the Colonials."

Edna came next and she looked very straight and dignified indeed as she offered her hand to Joe.

"We are very glad to welcome you to Birchville," she said sweetly, "and I hope," she added as a little afterthought, "that you won't miss the gypsies too much."

"She will grow to be a woman like Mother

la," said Joe as they waited for Marcia Gordon.

Marcia had a decided air about her, she might have been a princess receiving a prince.

"It's delightful to see you again," she said. "I have never forgotten your wonderful playing."

Joe watched her out of the room with admiring eyes.

Next came Honor Hare and Winny Betts together, they said they were afraid of gypsies.

"How do you do?" was all they could manage.

They were followed by Winny's small brother.

"Gee!" he said in disappointment, "you're just like everybody else now with those clothes on," and Joe grinned for the first time.

Stephen Winthrop came last.

"Put it there," he said, as he held out his hand. "I knew you'd come back to us some day and now hurry up and catch up to me in your lessons. I'm a very stupid guy, really, and then come to Bronckton with the rest of us."

"He is like Liubo," said Joe. "I liked him a lot before when I was here."

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The ordeal over, they began to play games and the evening ended in a wild game of hide and go seek in which Joe excelled when he was it to the extent of standing on the front porch and calling out all their hiding places for he had eyes that saw in the dark.

"Well, what did you think of all your new friends?" asked the Colonel when the last guest had gone.

"I liked them all, but most especially Stephen," said Joe. "Do you think, Colonel, that my fifty dollars would take me to that school he goes to?"

The Colonel chuckled to himself as he answered: "Undoubtedly my boy, undoubtedly."

Joy and Pam talked it over in bed.

"I think the crowd liked Joe, don't you?" asked Pam.

"I think Joe liked the crowd," said Joy.

CHAPTER II

SHOPPING

AT breakfast the next morning Joy and Pam could hardly eat a bite.

"It will be exciting to see Gloria, won't it?" asked Joy as she toyed with an egg.

Pam sipped her cocoa. "Yes, it will," she agreed, "but I wish Merry and Edna and Marcia were going, too."

"Dear child, this is a shopping expedition, not a lark," remonstrated Flora. "I know it seems mean that I didn't tell the Roots and the Talcotts we were going but there is so much to be done and if all the rest were going too there'd be no shopping and it would all end at the movies. Remember Gloria will be there and make the most of it."

"Oh, we will," promised Joy, "but we can't help wishing."

"No, and Merry is such fun in a store," Pam added.

Geoffrey Hotchkiss looked up from his morning paper.

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"Eat your breakfasts, girls," he said quietly, "or papa will have to feed you."

The girls ate what remained on their plates and as their father took out his watch and they saw the time they flew from the table and went to get their hats.

Joy had on a dress of yellow homespun material and Pam wore a green one to match. Their hats were felt and the same color as their frocks. They looked very *chic* as they took their places beside Flora in the waiting car.

"Not a sign of anybody," said Pam as they drove through the village street.

"They are all over at the Talcotts's probably," said Joy, a trifle wistfully.

They went the length of the village street when Pam saw the postman.

"Oh, Mummy, let's stop and see if he has a letter from Hope for us," and she was half way out of the car hailing that good-natured man.

"There is no mail for you, young ladies," he announced, "but here's one for your mother, no, two, and these bills and advertisements I'll just leave at the house." He handed Flora two letters and put the rest back in his bag.

Flora smiled and thanked him graciously. The letters were from Whisper and Amy Strong.

"Read Whisper's first," begged the girls and Flora opened the letter.

So intent were they over the contents that they did not look up when they reached the station and the car came to a stop, for the letter said that Whisper was coming home the next day but one.

Joy was the first to look up. "Oh, I am glad," she said. "That's the day Winthrop gives his party and I know he'll ask Whisper."

Her eyes traveled beyond the car and came to rest on the station platform.

"Mummy, look, do! oh, they are all here."

As Pam and her mother looked the waiting line all bowed solemnly.

Flora and the girls were speechless with laughter. Mab Talcott came forward followed by Ann Root.

For they were all there, all the Talcotts and all the Roots, not a member of either family was missing. Even the fathers were there and they looked very much amused.

"Did you two plan to shop together?" asked Flora. "You had more courage than I had."

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Mabs Talcott laughed. "Indeed, not. I made my family promise not to tell anybody we were going to-day but a little bird must have told the Roots because here we are and we may as well make the best of it."

"And, of course, we are all going to the same stores," laughed Mrs. Root. "What a day we'll have!"

Pam and Joy were completely surrounded and everyone was talking at once.

"Isn't it just too heavenly for words?" Merry exclaimed, "and now there's no excuse for Mabs not listening to my idea. Wait till you hear it. It's really thrilling and it's about us."

"Stop her, Dandy, stop her," exclaimed Spruce, "or she'll babble all day."

The arrival of the train made an end to Merry's speech and they all crowded on. It was the popular train in the morning and there were very few vacant seats. The men found some for their wives and Flora but the children had to stand up.

Merry gathered the girls around her and began her story.

"Well, I thought it would be just too heavenly if all of us girls bought sweaters and caps

to match, then when we were out on the grounds nobody could tell us apart or—you know what I mean. Maybe you older girls wouldn't want to do it but Pam and Joy and Hope and I could." She paused for breath with her characteristic little gasp.

Pam forgot the car of people and hugged her. "Oh, Merry, that's a wonderful idea," she exclaimed.

"How are we going to let Hope know about it?" demanded Joy equally delighted.

"Oh, we'll all buy her a sweater and tam to match ours and give them to her when we get to school." Merry looked appealingly at Edna and Marcia. They looked at each other for a minute.

"It's a beautiful idea, Merry, and as we are all going to be a sort of club, I think it would be great and we'll get Faith and Gloria to do it too, that will make eight of us and it ought to be a lark."

At this point the boys demanded attention and Bob made everybody in the car laugh by calling to his mother:

"Hey, Marm, movies would be lots more fun than shopping."

"Tell you what," said Mr. Talcott. "Get

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your shopping done this morning and I'll take you all to lunch and Root will blow us to the movies this afternoon."

"Motion carried unanimously," shouted Dandy, and Mr. Root after one look at Edna's smiling face, agreed to his end of it.

The train slid into the sheds at Hoboken and many were the smiles and chuckles as our party made their way towards the tube.

"Say, Marm, let's go by the ferry, you promised you would," said Ted.

"But, Ted, all the rest are going by the tube," Ann Root protested.

Dandy and Spruce pranced along like very small children beside their mother.

"Mother, we want to ride on the ferry boat," they begged and Dandy put his finger in his mouth.

"Boys, behave yourselves," begged Mabs but the boys were off and they had no idea of stopping.

"Want to go on the fer-r-r-ry boat," cried Dandy stamping a large foot.

"Daddy, make them behave," Mabs appealed to Mr. Talcott.

But Mr. Talcott was in stitches and so were some fifty commuters as Dandy, all uncon-

scious of an audience, went on imitating a very bad small boy.

"Mama, Mama, I'll hold my breath if you don't take me on the fer-r-r-ry boat," he cried.

It would not have been at all funny if the average person had done it but Dandy was a born actor and he carried all before him when he started to pretend.

Mabs knew he had the best of it and like the sensible mother she was she did not try to scold. She entered into the spirit of the game.

"Come along, young man, or I'll box your ears," she said in a low voice.

"No-no-no-no-no!" whimpered Dandy.

Mabs put out her hand and before Dandy knew what she was about she had him by the ear and was pulling him along. But towards the ferry.

The sail to Twenty-third Street was hugely enjoyed and Dandy admitted that his adored mother had gotten the best of him.

In the ferryhouse they separated. The boys went with their fathers and the girls with their mothers. Two taxicabs took them to a store up town where the shopping was delayed a little while they met Gloria and Faith with Mrs. Hotchkiss.

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Merry told them her plan and they agreed at once and decided on white beret caps and fuzzy white sweaters for best and dark blue ones for hikes. They all chipped in and bought duplicates for Hope.

After that came dresses. Gloria looked sweet in a rose silk and Marcia was demure in gray. Edna's choice was tan and Faith decided on a blue. Joy and Pam stuck to their own colors of yellow and green.

Then came shoes. Merry couldn't find a pair to fit her slender feet and had to have a pair made to order. Joy had a large foot from going barefoot so much, but it was beautifully formed and looked well with her slender ankle.

Hats were the last thing on the list and Merry made faces at herself in the glass as the astonished saleswoman tried them on her one after the other.

In spite of fears the lists were completed at last and it was a tired and hungry party that filed into the attractive tea room in the forties and waited there for their host.

He was not long in coming and the boys and Mr. Root followed.

He had phoned for a table and when they went to it they discovered that it had a bowl

of asters in the center and at each place was a box.

The girls opened their's first and found inside the tissue paper little bottles with glass flowered stoppers.

"How heavenly," sighed Merry and she gave her father the look for which he had been waiting.

Ted was the first of the boys to open his and he discovered a blue tie with white dots on it. The rest of the boys had the same thing.

"We'll wear them on church parade," laughed Spruce, "outside our uniforms."

"I dare you to," said Dandy, laughing.

"Boys, how stupid of daddy," exclaimed Babs. "He forgot all about your uniforms."

"No, I didn't," laughed Mr. Talcott. "The truth of the matter is, I told my secretary to come up here and buy favors for you all and the ties were her idea."

"And a good one to keep the twins from borrowing mine," grumbled Mr. Root.

In spite of the mistake everybody had a good time at luncheon and Spruce acted grown up with Gloria and Faith and they seemed to like it.

"What movie are we going to, Dad?" asked

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Edna, and her father looked at her for a moment in silence.

"My darling daughter, I haven't the remotest idea," he answered. "I told Miss Geeves to hunt out something good and phone for seats and then bless me, I went off and forgot it.

"Better go telephone her now and find out what she selected," suggested Ann Root.

Mr. Root left the table to return after a few minutes with a worried expression on his face.

"Box seats for a thing called 'Chang,' " he said. "Hope it's all right." Ted folded up his napkin in a hurry.

"Let's go," he said. "It's a jungle picture and it's great. I read all about it."

And a great picture they found it. Everybody enjoyed it to the uttermost, and when the elephants stampeded at the end Spruce felt it necessary to hold Gloria's hand, and she was so excited she didn't even know she was having her hand held, and one and all they wanted a monkey like the one on the screen for a pet.

Ted and Bob fell asleep on the train going home, but Merry kept the girls all awake with her constant chatter and the burden of it was Brookside.

CHAPTER III

STEPHEN'S PARTY

THE telephone in the Hotchkiss's living room pealed out its insistent summons and Joy ran to answer it.

"Hope it's Merry" she called back over her shoulder.

But it was not Merry. It was Mrs. Winthrop instead and she wanted to speak to Mrs. Hotchkiss.

"Flora, my dear, is that you?" she inquired when Flora had come to the telephone.

"Yes," said Flora, in a not very eager voice.

"I do think children can be the most inconsiderate beings," Mrs. Winthrop went on. "Here, at the last minute, Stephen tells me he must invite this little Whisper York, such an absurd name for a child."

"Why, I think that is very sweet and considerate of Stephen," Flora defended, "and surely one child won't make any difference."

Mrs. Winthrop's voice came querulously over the wire.

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"It upsets my whole table decorations and makes an uneven number of boys and girls."

"Why not ask another boy?" Flora asked sweetly.

"Oh, don't suggest it," Mrs. Winthrop wailed. "Stephen wants that gypsy and I just won't have him."

Flora considered for a moment and then spoke coldly.

"You must do exactly as you see fit, of course, but let me remind you that Joe is not a gypsy but the Colonel's adopted son and on the way to be a famous musician." Then she added with a little laugh. "You may be glad some day that you asked him to your party."

"Do you really think so?" asked Mrs. Winthrop. "Of course I wouldn't like to do anything to hurt the Colonel's feelings. Perhaps I'd better ask him."

"I would, if I were in your place, and it certainly would annoy the Colonel if you slighted him," Flora replied.

"Then I'll telephone him right away and, thank you, dear, for your advice," and Mrs. Winthrop rang off happy in the thought that she was possibly entertaining a future celebrity and Flora smiled to herself. She had

fixed it as she knew Stephen would want it and that pleased her, for after her own children, she loved Stephen, for she realized that he lacked a mother's understanding.

"Oh, Mummy, tell us about it," Pam begged when her mother turned from the telephone.

"Nothing to tell, darling, except that I think both Joe and Whisper will be at the party."

"Let's go down and tell her about it," suggested Joy and find out if her trunk has come. If it hasn't we'll have to lend her a dress."

"She'd look sweet in my pale pink one," Pam said. "Come along; let's go and see."

In the hall they met Miss Amy Strong directing an expressman where to put her trunk.

"That means Whisper's has come too, doesn't it, Aunt Amy?" Pam asked.

"Child, I'm busy, run down and talk to Whisper and don't bother me," said Amy in her strident tones.

"Humph!" said Joy. "She talks to us as if we were three years old. She doesn't talk to Whisper like that. I wonder why?"

Pam laughed gleefully. "Oh, Joy, don't you realize that Whisper is a marvel and that Aunt Amy adores her. Now she just likes us."

"Well, she has a funny way of showing it," giggled Joy and they ran down the lawn towards the gardener's cottage where Miss York, their former governess, lived with her niece, Sarah, who had been nicknamed Whisper by the Colonel, and so apt was it that her own name had been forgotten.

This morning Whisper was making the beds in the tiny house and trying not to miss Amy Strong and the lessons in sculpture that had been her daily fare all summer.

Miss York was unpacking her trunk for her and exclaiming over all her new clothes.

Pam banged the brass knocker violently.

"Oh, Sniffs," she said when Miss York opened the door, for Sniffs was another of the Colonel's nicknames that had stuck and Pam and Joy had adopted it for their very own.

There was no disrespect meant in the title, the girls accepted it as simple truth. Miss York did sniff.

"Oh, Sniffs, where is Whisper, and has her trunk come and has she a dress for this afternoon's party?" Pam demanded all at once.

Whisper's head appeared at the top of the stairs.

"What party and am I truly invited?" she asked eagerly, her small face radiant. She still looked too old and worried for her age, which was twelve, but she had lost much of the care-worn and unhappy look that had marked her on her coming to Birchville. No one could say she was just an ordinary girl, for she wasn't, but her very quaintness made her attractive and people invariably liked her.

"Stephen Winthrop's party and he just insisted that you come; you know he always liked you Whisper."

"I know I always liked him," said Whisper and there was just a touch of Amy Strong in the reply.

A knock at the front door cut short Pam's teasing reply.

"You go, please, my dear," said Miss York; "my arms are full of clothes."

So Whisper tripped down stairs and opened the door to Stephen Winthrop.

"How do you do?" he said, fumbling with a letter he held in his hands. "Glad to see you back and everything."

"How do you do, Stephen?" replied Whisper in her soft ripply voice. "I'm glad to be back."

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"Do you think you can come to my party this afternoon?" Stephen inquired. "Here's a note to your aunt."

"Oh, yes," sighed Whisper and took the letter.

"Well, good-by," said Stephen.

"Good-by," replied Whisper, and he left feeling somehow very miserable.

Whisper walked sedately upstairs and presented the note to her aunt.

"What does your mother say about her going, and Miss Strong?" she asked after she had read it.

"Oh, mother wants her to go, and I'm sure Aunt Amy does, too," Pam told her.

"Then you may go, my dear," said Miss York, "and I hope you will remember to behave like a little lady."

"Oh, Sniffs, as if Whisper could be anything else," Joy protested. "You'd better tell us to behave, we're much more liable not to."

Miss York sniffed and returned to her armful of clothes.

"What will you wear, Whisper?" Pam demanded, and at that moment there was a loud "Cooooeee" under the front window.

"There's Merry," said Whisper, and this

time she raced down the stairs and opened the door.

"Oh, Whisper, it's heavenly having you back and are you going to the party this afternoon, because if you're not I won't go either; it simply wouldn't be any fun without you." Merry rattled on and Whisper held up her hand.

"Merry," she said, and then she laughed, and when Whisper laughed it was a treat to listen to her.

"Merry, you haven't changed a bit," she said.

They talked about the party until luncheon time when Amy Strong arrived at the cottage with the terrifying announcement that she was staying to lunch. After her arrival the girls left in a hurry.

Three o'clock found them at the door of the Winthrop home and a maid let them in. They found Mrs. Winthrop almost in hysterics for it seemed that Stephen had seen the decorations on the dining room table and had refused to come to his own party.

The favors were baskets of candy for the girls and crêpe paper whips for the boys. Mrs. Winthrop had found them in the attic.

They were old dance favors and she insisted that they would do. Poor Stephen, when he had seen them, had just groaned and left the house and had not returned.

"Did you ever hear anything so ungrateful?" stormed Mrs. Winthrop. "Don't you think they are pretty favors, Ted?"

"Yes, Mrs. Winthrop," said Ted, struggling to be honest, "but I know what Stephen meant by not liking them; you see they are a little bit sissy for real boys."

"I never heard of such a thing," complained Mrs. Winthrop. "I don't know what the younger generation is coming to." It was noticeable that she was very charming to Joe who accepted her graciousness with a look of puzzled wonderment.

"Would you like us to go home?" suggested Marcia, who was feeling very sorry for Stephen.

"No, indeed, stay and have a nice time and that will just serve Stephen right. I suggest that you start in playing London Bridge is Falling Down or some nice game."

Edna Root jumped up. "Come on, Brud-dies," she said, "we'll play London Bridge and we'll have a good time doing it."

Spruce Talcott who had been looking at a magazine on the table gave Edna one look and subsided into a chair. He didn't dare look at Dandy nor at Mrs. Winthrop.

It was Dandy who came to Edna's rescue.

"All right, Ned, we'll be 'it,' " he said and they joined hands and started to sing.

The others joined in and soon the old game was in full sway.

"Now let's play 'What will you give an old bachelor to keep house with?' " suggested Spruce with a lordly air.

Dandy by common consent was "it" and the rest lined up against the wall. He asked them absurd questions and succeeded in making them all laugh except Whisper, who sat as solemn as a little judge. Joe did not laugh until Dandy asked him foolish questions about gypsies, then he had to smile.

Then came the fun of forfeits. As Edna held the first one over his head and chanted out "Heavy, heavy hangs over your head, what shall the owner do to redeem this forfeit?" Whisper slipped from the room and so quietly did she go that no one missed her.

Forfeits proved fun especially when Dandy knelt three times to Pam for kneel to the pret-

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tiest, bow to the wittiest and kiss the one you love the best and Joe knelt to Joy.

Marcia had given it to him to do after he had finished making Merry chatter like a monkey.

Mrs. Winthrop was out of the room, in fact she was in her bedroom reading a book and giving no more thought to the children down stairs.

There was a lull in the proceedings and the living room door opened and Whisper came in leading a very sullen Stephen.

"Hello, Sweetheart," greeted Dandy, using a name that Stephen had once when he and Joy rescued Mr. Demarest in the hut in the woods.

"Oh, cut it out," said Stephen.

"Come on in, Steve, and forget your troubles," said Edna, "we all understand."

Stephen nodded grumpily and Spruce suggested playing forfeits again.

This time Marcia was "it" and when Stephen's wrist watch, a birthday present from his father, was held over her head she said:

"Let him bow to the wittiest, kneel to the prettiest and kiss the one he loves the best."

"Aw, gee!" groaned Stephen, "that's no fun."

"Maybe not for you but it is for us," laughed Edna and Dandy added, "come on, Sweetheart."

Stephen went over to Joy and bowed jerkily then he flopped down on one knee to Pam and did the same thing to Merry.

"Never could decide which of you two was the prettiest," he said with a grin and then he turned to Whisper;

"Mind if I kiss you?" he said.

"Oh, Stephen, do you love me the best?" she asked eagerly.

"Guess so," said Stephen and he pecked at her cheek.

After that they played a guessing game of Dandy's invention that kept them in peals of laughter.

Then came the dreaded refreshments and the favors.

"Oh, mum has one of these," said Ted flourishing a paper whip, "and I used to play with it when I was a kid," he added tactlessly.

Stephen blushed and even his mother looked confused.

But the refreshments were delicious and

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the girls all pretended to be delighted with their baskets of candy.

They talked it over on their way going home.

"I'm glad Mabs is my mother," said Merry.

"Poor Stephen," said Dandy feelingly.

"Some people just don't like children," said Pam.

Joy drew a deep breath: "Maybe she'll like him when he grows up," she remarked.

Whisper had the final word:

"How can she help loving Stephen?" she asked wonderingly.

"It's easy to see she is not a gypsy," said Joe.

CHAPTER IV

OFF TO SCHOOL

JOE stood on the Colonel's veranda and looked out across the two fields that led to the Hotchkiss place. He was feeling very lonely and the house had suddenly grown too small for him. He must see Joy and as quickly as possible. He walked away, his head down, the very picture of dejection. The Colonel watched him from the window of his study and sighed.

At Joy's house he was met by a shout of "Hello" from the twins and Pam and Whisper. Bob and Ted were dressed in uniform and looked very smart. Pam was all aflutter for the important day of Birchville had arrived.

The morning was to see the boys off for school and in the early afternoon the girls left.

"Where is Joy?" asked Joe crossly.

"In the house having a tuck taken in her dress but she'll be out in a moment," Pam told him.

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"Aw, stay with us," Bob said, as Joe turned off to walk down the side path that led to the barns; "we won't see you for a long time and maybe you'll miss us."

"Yes," said Joe thoughtfully, "I shall miss you but I shall miss Joy most."

"Well, I'm going to miss Joy myself," Bob defended. "You're not the only one around here that likes her."

Joe sighed. "Everybody must miss Joy," he said in a matter of fact tone. "She is the kind of a person to be missed."

"Yes," Bob agreed, "and anyhow I don't want to fight. Come on down to the station to see us off, Joe."

Joe nodded and stood in silence watching the door.

"You will write me letters, Ted, once in a while?" begged Pam.

"Well, I will if I have time," promised Ted, "but you know how it will be with all the fellows, and you'll have all the girls, and—well I guess neither one of us will have much time to write this winter. At least I hope I won't."

"Oh, Ted," said Pam, not understanding at all. "I think you're mean and if you don't

write to me sometimes I won't be a bit glad to see you when vacation comes."

"Oh, I expect I'll write sometimes," and in his usual downright way Ted dismissed the subject.

"Hello, everybody; hello Joe." Joy stood in the doorway and made a charming picture in the autumn sunlight.

She was dressed in a dark blue traveling suit with a white mannish shirt and yellow necktie. Pam was in a similar suit and her tie was her favorite green. Both were ready to travel except that they had not put on their hats.

Mrs. Payton followed Joy out to the steps.

"Hurry, children, or Bob and Ted will miss their train. Joe, will you go with them and see that they come straight home after the train leaves? They'll just have time for luncheon before they go themselves, and girls, be sure and bring Edna and Marcia home with you."

"Good-by, Mrs. Hotchkiss," said Bob. "You won't forget to send Stephen those boxes of cake will you?" he asked.

Flora put her arm around his shoulder and bent to kiss him.

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"No, I won't forget, and in each one I'll put a note telling him he must give the Root twins a piece," she said laughing.

Ted kissed her next and they were preparing to go when Joe, with his wonderful eyesight, saw some one down the road.

"Stephen Winthrop come to say good-by," he announced.

"Oh, we'll wait and walk back to the station with him," said Pam, but Joy shook her head.

"Let him have a minute alone with mummy," she said, and Flora nodded.

"'Lo, everybody," shouted Stephen as he came up the drive. He was lugging a big, heavy suitcase and the contents were peeping out. A tie dangled from the bottom and the cuff of a shirt hung out below the handle.

"That woman," said Flora, and she turned abruptly to Pam.

"Go and tell them to have the car around as quickly as possible. You'll find Tom in the garage," she said. "Where's your mother, Stephen?"

Stephen's face fell. "She's got a headache and she can't take me to school, but I'll get there all right with the Talcotts. Dad's away

on a business trip or he'd have taken me," he added.

"Oh, Ann Root will see that you are all right and I'll come down to the station with you. Here, let me stick those things in your bag," and Stephen, always happy when he was with Flora, followed her into the house and on to the living room.

The twins and Pam and Joy and Joe walked on towards the station. On the way Bob said feelingly:

"Poor old Steve! Just imagine our mum having a headache on the day we were going to school."

"Don't be silly; she couldn't," said Ted.

"I don't like Mrs. Winthrop," said Joe. "I think I hate her," and he walked on, his head in the air, as though he had announced the feelings of the world towards Mrs. Winthrop.

"I know I do," said Joy.

They walked on in silence and finally Mrs. Root met them at the station platform surrounded by bags. The Talcotts and the Betts were there too and Bob went straight to his mother.

"Mum," he said, "Mrs. Hotchkiss wants you to take very good care of Stephen because

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his mother has a headache and can't go with him to school to-day."

"That woman," Mrs. Root echoed Flora, and Mabs doubled up her small fists.

"Boys," she said, addressing her two sons, Dandy and Spruce, "you have got to be extra nice to Stephen Winthrop, do you hear?"

"Now Mabs, don't excite yourself, it's bad for you; and Dandy and I promise that we will kiss Stephen good-night every night and see that he brushes his teeth in the morning. Could you ask more than that?"

"Oh, boys, don't tease him," pleaded Mabs.

Dandy saw his mother was truly upset and hastened to reassure her.

"As old boys Stephen is our find and woe betide anybody who is not nice to him," he said.

"Besides old Stephen can look out for himself," Spruce added.

"Let's give him a cheer when he gets here," suggested Ted.

The car from the Hotchkiss garage drove up and Stephen and Flora got out followed by Mr. Hotchkiss. Geoffrey for all his smiles looked very angry and the girls knew that Mrs. Winthrop was the cause of it.

"Here comes Jim Grady to say good-by," he said to Stephen.

"Gee! that's nice of him," Stephen said as the long, rangy Westerner sauntered down the platform, one huge hand held out to Stephen.

The train whistled and Mabs began to weep. She was not going with Dandy and Spruce because it was their second year and they had asked her most politely not to. Mrs. Root, of course, was taking the twins and Edna had been turned over to Mrs. Payton. As it was Merry's first year at Brookside Mabs was taking her.

"Spruce, dear, do get the idea out of your head that you want to be an aviator," Mabs begged as they swung on the train. Spruce found a seat and stuck his head out of the window.

"I have to be one, Mabs," he laughed; "the air calls me. There's not room on earth and you'll be awfully proud when you are my first passenger. No, don't sit here, young Bob, I'm saving this place for Stephen," and he blew his mother a kiss as the train pulled out of the station. Joy and Pam watched it carry the twins out of sight.

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"Things will never be the same again," said Pam sadly; "we'll grow up and so will they and they won't want to play with us any longer and they'll be putting on airs and, oh, just for the minute I wish we were none of us going."

"Oh, I think it's going to be heavenly having them grow up," exclaimed Merry.

"They won't change so much inside," said Joy wisely; "they'll always be our very best friends."

Mabs Talcott put her hand on Joe's shoulder:

"You're the only son we have left, you must come to see us often," she said still a little tearfully.

Joe nodded, he was torn between two fires. To stay home with the Colonel and play the violin or to go to boarding school with this bunch of happy boys.

"Joy, will you walk home through the woods with me?" he asked. "There's a robin with a hurt wing near your clump of birches and I want to see if he is better."

For a second Joy wanted to say no, for she would rather have gone with the girls, but she knew she would not see Joe for a long time

and she knew, too, that he was unhappy, so she smiled and nodded.

"Come along, we'll have to hurry though for luncheon is early to-day," she said, and they started off in the direction of the woods.

Whisper was the last to leave. She stood on the platform and looked down the tracks to where they seemed to meet like two shining ribbons in the sunlight.

"If Joe is the only son of the village then Whisper is the only daughter," Geoffrey Hotchkiss remarked.

"Oh, Daddy just loves Whisper," said Merry. "You must keep Mabs and Dad happy while I'm away," she went on.

"I'll try," replied Whisper seriously, "but I don't see, Merry, how I can take your place."

"Well, I don't exactly want you to do that," laughed Merry, and then Flora called them all to hurry to luncheon.

Edna and Marcia were in the best of spirits and did their best to cheer up the rest through the meal. Merry and her mother stayed at the Hotchkiss's and Merry's spirits fell as the minutes passed.

Joe and Joy had investigated the robin and found it nearly well and had talked over all

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the happy gypsy days, and to Joe's "do you remember?" Joy had answered a faithful "yes," though to tell the truth the memory of her gypsy days had faded into a half remembered dream.

At luncheon everybody but Merry tried to be gay and the meal passed quickly and before they knew it it was time to go to the station once more.

Merry and her mother went home to collect their bags and a few minutes later the others all crowded into the Hotchkiss's car and drove away, Jane and Bridget giving them a tearful send-off from the front steps of the house.

Miss York and Amy Strong were at the station; they had been lunching together and arguing over Whisper's future at Miss York's cottage. They were both full of advice and tried to give it in their different ways until the train pulled in to the platform and the girls, eager now to start, got on.

The trip into the city was uneventful but not so the meeting with Gloria and Faith and Hope Chalmers. Gloria's father was there and with him a porter with eight violet boxes. Mr. Payton gave one to each girl and they

opened them to find beautiful bunches of single violets.

"Oh, Uncle, you are a darling," said Joy, and Pam kissed him enthusiastically and Merry followed suit.

"How heavenly," she pronounced it, "just as if we were really grown up."

They caught the two-fifteen train for Linden and found a car full of Brooksidiers.

Hope got up to make a speech.

"Friends, Brooksidiers and country girls," she began, "let me present three new girls who are going to act like old girls and who must be treated with respect due to my best friends."

"I don't think it's very nice for Hopey to choose her best friend from among the new girls," said Janet Lincoln in an audible whisper.

"That's Janet," said Hope quick as a flash; "she's always complaining about something. Janet, love, I give you six weeks to agree with me and if you don't at the end of that time I'll turn around and be your best friend."

"Oh, Hopey," cried Merry in a fright, and Janet called back gayly, "No, thanks, I don't

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want you for a best friend, you get me into too many scrapes. I wish you joy of her, Merry."

"Oh, thank you," said Merry. "I think it's heavenly getting into scrapes and I won't mind a bit."

They chattered on until the train steamed into the little Linden station and there Hope took command.

"Mothers and Aunts, taxis on the right. Major quartette the home Ford and minor quartette that moth-eaten taxi over there. All aboard, everybody," and as the Ford jerked forward she added:

"We're off for Brookside to make history, everybody cheer," and to the shouting of "Brookside! Brookside! Brookside!" they entered the school grounds and began their first year, Joy, Pam and Merry as Brook-siders.

"We're really here," said Pam tremulously.

"Boarding school at last," whispered Joy.

"How heavenly," sighed Merry through her tears.

CHAPTER V

BROOKSIDE

THE first to meet the girls on their arrival at the school was Lindy, the mascot of Brookside, a big, shaggy-haired, English sheep dog, which, when he stood up, was as tall as a man.

“Well, Lindy,” greeted Gloria, “give us your paw and say ‘hello!’ ”

Lindy solemnly held out his paw and gave a short bark, then he trotted over to Joy and sniffed her skirt; satisfied that she was a friend he jumped up on her and put his two paws on her shoulders and tried to lick her face.

Joy put her arms around him and hugged him.

Brooksiders surrounded them. Emily Benton came up and claimed acquaintanceship from the year before and so did Hilda Landis and Peggy Simms and Gail Woolcott. They had with them a girl of about Pam’s age, named Cherry St. John. She was plump and

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rosy-cheeked and was not at all unlike her unusual name. Her eyes were gentian blue and her hair taffy colored and she spoke with a funny little lisp.

She was the only other new girl that Pam and Joy noticed in all the bewildering crowd of girls and they were delighted when she said:

“You’re Joy and Pam and my alcove is next to yours. Isn’t it all simply wonderful?”

The above named girls were particular friends of Marcia and Edna and Gloria and Hope and Faith, and they all escorted the two quartettes up to their room.

Mabs and Flora and Miss Chalmers and Mrs. Hotchkiss went in to see Miss Little.

Brookside School was an old white-washed building with many wings that had been added on in a haphazard fashion without hurting the whole. There were numerous balconies that jutted out from long windows and no less than three outside stairways to be used in case of fire. The hall inside shone with polished brass and shiny mahogany and though it was only September and a crisp cool day, the air from the sea made a fire look cozy in the big hearth in the hall.

The minor quartette left the major quartette on the first landing and made its way up to the postscript, so called because it had been added on.

Emily Benton, always called Lee, and Hilda Landis, usually called Hildy, went with the older girls for they were in their class, but Peggy Simms and Gail Woolcott escorted Joy and Pam. Lindy was still with them, too, and when they reached Joy's alcove he settled himself on the bed with all the intention of staying the night.

"Precious lamb," said Joy and hugged him again.

"Did you bring anything to fix up your alcove with?" asked Gail and a cross voice from beyond the curtain said:

"Gail, is all my teaching in vain? Haven't I repeatedly told you not to end a sentence with a preposition."

"Oh, how do you do Miss Sands?" Hope pulled back the curtain and a tall, angular woman poked her head in and nodded at everyone in a pecking sort of a way. For all the world like a robin going after a worm, thought Joy to herself.

Hope did the introducing and after Miss

Sands had acknowledged each new name with a word or two she turned again to Gail and continued her lecture.

"We have had that point brought up many times in the classroom and I cannot understand your being so slovenly. English is your native tongue and the very least you can do is to speak it correctly. You may write out that sentence correctly fifty times to-morrow and bring it to my classroom before five o'clock. I give you this task not only to benefit yourself but to act as an example to the new girls that English at Brookside must be taken seriously outside of school as well as inside. . . ."

"Oh," groaned Gail, "and to-morrow is the homesick party, too, but I can tear off fifty lines to-morrow morning after chapel while you girls are showing Joy and Pam and Merry and Cherry the grounds."

"Oh, dear!" said Merry forlornly, "what a crosspatch she is and Ed and March told us all the teachers in Brookside were nice." A laugh sounded outside in the corridor and a cheery voice said:

"So they are, my dear, so they are," and without invitation a young, attractive face

peeked around the curtain and the girls recognized Miss Dix, the physical instructor, from the year before when they had visited Brookside.

"Oh, come in, Miss Dix; we're all here, all the future basketball captains for the next few years," laughed Hope.

"Who's this?" Miss Dix asked, looking at Merry.

Peggy introduced her and Merry put out her hand.

"I'm thrilled to death to meet you, Miss Dix; Marcia and Edna say such heavenly things about you," she said smiling through her frowns.

"Good for Marcia and Edna," said Miss Dix with a delightful chuckle. "Now Hope would tell you no such thing. She'd say I was an old ogress who growls fiercely, wouldn't you, Hope?"

"I would not," said Hope flatly. "I'd say you were an angel until some one made you mad and then—well, girls, all I can say is Miss Dix hates an untidy cove above all things. If you keep neat and take a cold shower every morning and have an active interest in gym, why you'll adore Miss Dix, won't they?" and

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she turned to the teacher for corroboration.

"Well, I don't know about that," laughed Miss Dix, "but if they are all that I shall end by adoring them."

She was gone as quickly and as quietly as she had come.

"Oh, she's heavenly," breathed Merry. "I'd take a cold shower as many times a day as she said, just to make her like me."

Peggy Simms looked up and laughed. "Say that on a cold morning in December with the temperature at zero and it won't be so heavenly."

"Did you or didn't you bring stuff to fix your alcove with—I mean with which to fix up your cove?" Gail asked, and the others laughed.

"Yes, we did," Joy replied, "all the same and just like Marcia's and Edna's. Bedspreads and curtains and shirt-waist boxes. They are in our trunks, all except the boxes and they are coming by express."

"Oh, good!" said Gail; "we ought to have a festive postscript." She turned to Cherry. "How about you?" she asked.

Cherry blushed vividly.

"Sorry," she said, "but I have nothing and

there's no use in my asking my stepmother to get me anything because she wouldn't."

"Just what I wanted to know; I've mine from last year that I've been trying to give away," Gail said, and then to cover up the embarrassment that they all felt she added: "Come along, let's get it from the storeroom and fix up your cove now and then you can help us fix ours when our trunks come."

Gail and Peggy and Cherry left and the four girls sat for a minute in silence after they had gone.

"Imagine any one being mean to Cherry," said Pam and the other three nodded.

"Just think of our all being in one class and there's not a horrid girl in the lot," said Joy.

"I call it heavenly," Merry exclaimed; "every single girl as nice as can be."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, you haven't seen all the class yet, there are two more to see and you may not like them quite so well," Hope told them. "They are best friends and they never go with anybody else and they boss the class in everything."

"Well, they won't boss us," Pam said decidedly. "We are seven to two and the majority rules."

Hope gave a happy little sigh; "I hope it will be that way this year," she said.

The other girls came back with their arms full of cretonne and for the next half hour they were busy trimming Cherry's alcove. Then Hope went to find her curtains and bedspread and they fixed hers next and laid out the pretty brush and comb and manicure set in white ivory with her initial on it in blue enamel.

Cherry's brush was wood and her comb black. It was easy to see that the child had been sent off with as little as possible, but with her little she seemed perfectly happy and was brimming over with fun.

In the midst of these preparations came the sound of a loud horn and Hope looked out on the driveway below.

"Girls," she said solemnly, "your two favorite classmates are arriving."

"Retta and Grace, and together of course," said Gail. "Why did they have to come back? Now they'll want to boss things and run the class the way they did last year."

"But, oh, best beloved, this year we won't let them," Hope replied as she fluffed up a sofa cushion. "We were new girls then and

we had Jane and Mary against us and they are not back this year."

Peggy sat down on the freshly smoothed bed and began to laugh.

"The two won't like it but they'll have to lump it," she said inelegantly. "This year they won't find everybody yes ma'aming them."

As she spoke there was a commotion at the end of the corridor and a high voice said:

"Where is everybody?"

"Here we are," said Gail, none too graciously, and the curtain was pulled open and the two girls stood before the others.

They were about thirteen and dressed in a style beyond their years and they had make-up on their faces. They were both about the same height, which was tall for their age, and they were slight and willowy. Their clothes were the latest thing in fashion but except for a smirk on their rouged lips they had no expression whatever.

"Have you seen Miss Little yet?" demanded Peggy.

"Not likely, with this on our faces," said Retta. "We don't want to be expelled just yet."

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Grace looked rudely at the new girls then she said pertly to Joy.

"What are you thinking of, Miss Thoughtful? I suppose you're homesick."

"No," said Joy laughing a little. "I was just thinking what we would do to you if we had you in Birchville."

Grace looked surprised.

"Why what do you mean?" she said haughtily.

"Oh, we'd just take you down to the pond and duck you," Joy went on cheerfully, "but I doubt very much if even that would do you any good."

"Oh, is that so!" retorted Grace, too surprised to make anything but a commonplace remark.

"Just about," Pam replied for Joy, and then the two young imps laughed uproariously and the two girls knew that they were the object of their mirth.

"Better go wash your faces," said Merry, "or we may decide to do it now."

"Why, you're nothing but new girls and just wait till I'm president of the class and I'll show you your place."

"Yes," laughed Hope, "we'll wait," and

Gail and Peggy joined in the laughter that followed.

"Well, I'm not going to stay where I'm not wanted," said Retta. "Come on, Grace," and looking rather downcast they left the alcove.

Joy looked guilty and turned to the others:

"I was awfully fresh for a new girl," she said. "Please excuse me, but somehow I couldn't help it."

"Excuse you? It was heavenly," replied Hope. "Do you realize, girls, that we won't have to do anything the way they say any more and that some one else will be president of the class?"

"It's too good to be true," sighed Gail.

"I feel kind of sorry for them," said Cherry but she said it with a little laugh.

Merry put her hand on Hope's shoulder.

"Hopey," she said, "why didn't you ever tell me about those two?" she asked reproachfully.

"Afraid you'd think our class had no backbone," said Hope. "You see Retta and Grace were the skeletons in our cupboard and we didn't want to show them until we had to. Besides I knew it would all be different this year."

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“Merry, where are you?” came Mabs’s voice, and at the same time Flora called Joy and Pam.

The time had come to say good-byes.

Merry cried and hung to Mabs’s neck but when Mabs offered to take her home she refused to go.

Joy and Pam were dry eyed but tearful inside and their lips trembled as they saw the taxi depart.

One member of the major quartette took an arm of the minor quartette and walked them off to see the grounds, for the lump that won’t be swallowed is the one that comes as mothers and aunts disappear at the bend of the road and you feel for the first time that you are alone.

“Real Brooksiders at last,” said Marcia.

The minor quartette nodded vigorously; the lump was still there but it was fast disappearing.

CHAPTER VI

RETTA AND GRACE

THE first day at Brookside was a busy one. The girls rose at seven and after their cold baths hurried into their clothes and went down to breakfast in the big cheerful dining room. Even the china on the tables seemed to laugh with its design of corn flowers and in the general air of excitement no one had a chance to get homesick.

After breakfast there was a short chapel exercise conducted by Miss Little. Then came lessons. Forty minutes to every teacher.

Joy and Pam and Merry and Hope sat together in class and Hope noticed that they liked Miss Humphreys, the history teacher better than any of the rest except perhaps Mademoiselle, the little French woman who taught French, and who's real name was Renee Duval but who was never called anything but Mam'selle. She spoke with a decided accent and had a terrible time with her s's.

The math. teacher was not so popular. She

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spoke with a Southern drawl and prefaced all her remarks with "Don't you all think it would be nice to multiply this and that?" when the girls didn't at all want to multiply anything.

Miss Doty they liked for all her severity because she made art a living thing and spent the whole forty minutes allotted to her in showing them pictures and talking about foreign countries which she took it for granted they would all visit some day.

At twelve o'clock the bell rang for gym and there was a strenuous half hour of exercise before luncheon.

Everybody had a lot to talk about at that meal and opinions to exchange.

Merry thought all the teachers heavenly but liked Miss Dix the best. Joy liked the gypsy looks of little Mam'selle and Pam rather leaned to Miss Humphreys while Hope stood out for her old favorite, Miss Doty.

Gail and Peggy and Cherry liked Miss Dix and it was easy to see that gym was going to be their favorite "study."

After luncheon Miss Little rose to tell them that the rest of the afternoon was theirs in which to get settled and reminded them that

that evening they would hold the homesick party for the new girls.

No one paid much attention to Retta or Grace and they pretended not to mind, but inside they were very much surprised and tried hard to adjust their minds to this new order of things.

After they had all been dismissed in the assembly hall there was a race for the express room. At the door the two quartettes met and Marcia said:

"It's too nice to spend the day unpacking. Get out your caps and sweaters and meet us on the hill. Hopey will bring you."

"Oh, come on," shouted Pam. "Hopey, we have sweaters and tams to match, all of us."

"Oh, dear, why didn't you write and tell me and I could have had the same thing," Hope replied crossly.

"Oh, but Hopey, we"— began Merry, but Joy pinched her just in time.

They found Miss Dix had already arranged about their trunks being put in their alcoves and they hurried to them to get out the wanted sweaters and caps.

Hope went to her cove with a tiny feeling of having been left out and the three con-

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spirators went to Joy's and whispered to Merry:

"When you have them unpacked whistle and we'll both come to you, and then we'll call Hope," Pam directed and Merry nodded in understanding.

It was not long before Merry whistled and the other two with their caps and sweaters on hurried to her alcove.

"Oh, Hopey, come here a minute," Merry called. "I want to show you something."

Hope never stayed hurt for long, she had too much sense, so she came in humming to stop in surprise at the sight of the three girls holding out a package to her.

"What's this?" she inquired.

"To open it would be a good way to find out," laughed Joy and Hope untied the string.

. . . The sweaters one white and one blue and the caps to match tumbled to the floor and Hope had her arms around the three girls.

"Angels," she said; "what made you think of me?"

"Don't be silly, Hopey; as if we could think of ourselves without thinking of you, too," Merry exclaimed. "Why the very first min-

ute I thought of the plan, I thought to myself, how can I let Hopey know for, of course, it wouldn't have been any fun"—

"Merry," thundered Pam, "you know what Spruce told me, do stop babbling."

"Oh, all right," replied Merry, good naturedly, "but, Hopey, isn't it heavenly?"

"Of course it is, and, darling, you can talk as much as you please," Hope said laughing.

Looking very much alike they all started to leave the postscript when Joy stopped to listen. From somewhere came the sound of muffled sobbing as though the person who was crying really and truly did not want to be heard.

"That's Cherry," said Joy; "let's take her out with us, she must be homesick."

Hope shook her head, "No, it's something beside that; Cherry has nothing to be homesick for."

"Had we better go in to her?" asked Pam and Joy said, "oh, we must."

They went in and Hope pulled the pillow off of Cherry's face and asked her what the trouble was.

"I want to go home," said Cherry.

Now Hope knew that Cherry did not want

to go home at all and she guessed and rightly that the trouble was something else.

"Tell us," Hope begged. "Something has happened and you'd better tell us what it is."

But Cherry kept on sobbing and shaking her head.

Joy knelt down by the bed and put her arms around the girl tenderly.

"Tell me, dear," she whispered softly.

"It's Retta and Grace. They saw me in my old felt hat and they made fun of me. I didn't think I'd care about clothes but you all look so nice I am ashamed and, well—I was just crying it out. I'll be all right in a minute and I'll learn not to care about my old things, I guess."

There was silence for a few minutes and then Hope said with a quick intake of breath as though she was terribly embarrassed.

"Listen to me, Cherry. I have just had a present of two sweaters and two caps. Now I have two of my own and if I give them to you will you promise not to tell a soul. Here, wait a minute," and she hurried out of the alcove and returned a minute later with a dark red sweater and two tams.

"They are yours, and if you ever tell a liv-

ing soul that I gave them to you I'll never forgive you," and the minor quartette walked out of the room and hurried downstairs before they could be thanked.

Cherry looked at the offering and at her own shabby hat then she dried her eyes and put on the red sweater and the red tam. Poor child, she had been used to having people give her things all her life and she had no false pride about accepting a gift that was given with such a spirit of good will.

"Hope," said Merry solemnly, "that was just heavenly of you."

"Nonsense," said Hope, "It might have been worth while if I had given her my new ones, but this way I was just giving her something I didn't want myself," and she sighed a tiny sigh for that red sweater and cap had been among her most cherished possessions.

They found the major quartette waiting for them on the hill, a small knoll about fifty feet from the house and the only hill that the school grounds boasted.

"Hokey," said Marcia, "I appeal to you as an old girl, something has got to be done about Retta and Grace. They are over making fun of the younger children and behaving in a

way that is not at all Brooksideish. As they are your classmates you ought to do something to them to put them where they belong."

"We have another count against them, too," replied Hope and then Merry began.

"They made Cherry cry teasing her about her old hat and Hope gave her her old one and I think it was perfectly"—

"Merry," said Hope, "one more word and I'll take you down to the pool and dump you."

"That might be the thing for Retta and Grace," laughed Gloria. "I remember once it did me a lot of good."

"Let's do it! Just the four of us," said Hope. "We'll get into trouble, but who cares?"

"But we ought to help," said Edna; "we suggested it."

"No," returned Hope, "you have positions of importance in school and we're just second class."

"I hate to be a wet blanket," said Faith slowly, "but to use one of Miss Little's favorite expressions, 'two wrongs don't make a right,' and you girls would only get into trouble. Why we had a girl expelled for pushing another into the pool two years ago and I

know Miss Little would be really angry. There must be a better way."

They all thought for a minute and then Marcia asked:

"Faith, what did you do to Sadie Perkins the year before I came?"

"We boycotted her; it started with four of us and it spread to the whole school and she came round all right."

"It won't be nearly as much fun as ducking them in the pool," said Joy regretfully "but perhaps it will have more effect on those two."

"Let's see this pool you've been talking about," said Merry and they started for it all arm in arm and as far as sweaters and caps went all dressed exactly alike.

"Hello, you," called Retta as they passed a group of girls of which they formed part.

"We tired of these kids, can we tag along with you?" asked Grace.

The girls turned to Faith as the oldest girl among them and Faith rose to the occasion.

"No, you may not come with us," she said. "We don't approve of the way you have started the year at Brookside and teasing the younger girls is not a pastime we indulge in.

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Please don't speak to us for we have no intention of answering you."

Retta and Grace looked at her for a moment and then tossed their heads in the air.

"Oh, very well," said Grace; "we aren't afraid of your boycotting us," and she and her chum walked away.

The group of smaller children had heard as Faith meant them to and they greeted the two girls coldly on their return.

The boycott had started.

The grounds at Brookside were not large and it was easy to get permission to go beyond the limits of the school yard.

Gloria and Edna had received that permission before they came out so that they started now in the direction of the sand dunes.

"What a shame we can't get this property to add to the grounds, isn't it?" asked Marcia.

"Yes," replied Hope, "and if the railroad ever turns this into a freight yard it will mean that Miss Little will have to build a high fence and cut off our view of the water."

"What a shame that would be," commented Pam, "but there isn't any railroad here now."

Edna pointed down the road and in the distance they saw the smoke of a locomotive.

"Near enough," she said. "But look at the water; isn't it gorgeous to-day?"

A small bay stretched out before them and the waves glistened as they rose and fell and tossed about in the sunlight.

"What a spot for a picnic," exclaimed Joy, and Hope nodded.

"We have one here every autumn," she said. "We'll have it in a couple of weeks from now."

"Time to go home," said Marcia consulting her wrist watch. "We've got to ask the last class if there is anything we can do to help them get ready for to-night."

When they returned they found Katie, Miss Little's personal maid and companion, waiting for them in the hall.

"Miss Little wants you four girls in her room at once," she said importantly.

"We're in for it," said Edna with an uncomfortable feeling.

"Don't know about that," said Faith, who knew the principal of Brookside better than the rest.

"Are we going to tell?" asked Gloria.

"Not unless we have to," said Faith, knocking on the door of the room marked "Office."

CHAPTER VII

CHEERRY

MISS LITTLE turned quickly from her place at her desk.

"What's this I hear about boycotting Retta and Grace?" she asked at once.

The girls stood in uncomfortable silence till at last Hope said:

"We thought they deserved it."

"That's what I want to get at," Miss Little rapped out. "Why did they deserve it?"

"We'd rather not say," Faith protested. "It was something we thought we could settle for ourselves."

Miss Little tapped the desk with the end of her pencil.

"Well, as it happens, you don't need to tell. I have had Cherry down here and learned all about Hope's generosity. I'm glad you are not tattletales, and I want your advice on how to proceed with the boycott. I have watched Retta and Grace for two years and they do not seem to get the spirit of

Brookside. I regret that they are bullies. Do you think boycotting will do them any good?"

"We thought of ducking them in the pool," said Joy honestly and the tension of the room lightened as Miss Little put back her head and laughed.

"Glad you didn't," she said; "but I don't like this boycotting much better. It breaks a girl's spirit and that doesn't help anybody. No, I think I had better talk to Retta and Grace and if that doesn't improve matters, you'll have to take matters into your own hands again. Did you enjoy your walk?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Merry. "It was heavenly."

"I like your spirit, girls; I am particularly pleased with you Hope, and now run along and don't be snippy to Retta and Grace," and Miss Little dismissed them with one of her rare smiles.

"Thanks be, that's over," said Faith; "the boycott I mean."

"Yes, so am I, but it doesn't really mean that we won't have to do it again," said Pam. "A talking to won't touch those two girls."

The old girls looked at each other and laughed.

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"Easy to see you never had one of Miss Little's lectures," said Marcia. "My dear, they are apt to make an impression."

Two of the seniors came down the corridor and stopped short when they saw the bevy of eight girls.

"Hello, there," said Sally Bassett. "Here come the self-appointed disciplinarians."

"Yes," said Phyllis Schuyler. "They don't look like impertinent children either."

Marcia stepped out of the group and addressed the two girls.

"We're really awfully sorry we started anything without consulting you as last class girls but it all happened in a minute. We were so mad and we didn't think you wanted to be bothered."

"Very pretty apology," said Phyl laughing. "Shall we accept it, Sally?"

"Mean it from the bottom of your hearts?" Sally asked.

"Hope to die if we don't," said Gloria.

"Then we'll forgive you, that is if you'll all come and help fix the chairs for to-night," Phyllis replied. "I suppose you'll have the first dance with Retta and Grace."

"Come to think about it," said Edna, "that

would be a good way of showing that the boycott is off."

"Do we need to go that far?" asked Hope seriously. In her heart she still wished that they could show their active displeasure for there was nothing forgiving about Hope. Once she hated it was apt to be for all time.

Merry, her chum, was just the opposite; she was too much like her name to hate anybody for very long.

"Maybe if we're extra nice to them, they'll see how silly they are," she said and all but Hope agreed with her.

They reached the Assembly Hall and found it full of seniors and just as they were going to go in Sally exclaimed:

"Why these are new girls, can't possibly let them in before to-night," and she pointed to Merry and Joy and Pam.

"No, it would spoil the surprise," said Phyl. "Go away, you three, and Hope don't you dare to tell them what is going to happen."

"No fear," said Hope, "see you later in the postscript," she called as the three girls with their hands over their eyes in mock despair left the room.

In the postscript the first person they saw

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was Peggy Simms and she came towards them with outstretched hands.

"Where have you been all afternoon? Gail and I have looked everywhere for you. We think you're wonderful and we're with you no matter what anybody says. Cherry's like a new girl since she got that sweater and cap and we know how Hopey loved them."

"Has Cherry been telling? Hope will be cross," said Merry and just then Katie came into the hall and called.

"Miss Retta and Miss Grace, now then, now then, you are wanted at once in Miss Little's office. Now then, better not keep her waiting."

It was Katie's habit to preface most of her remarks with "now then" so that it had given her her nickname. She had little or no use for the girls at Brookside for they all seemed to her to be thorns in her adored Miss Little's side. But she served faithfully and under her rough exterior there was a heart that was touched now and then. Curiously enough the girls all liked her and it was with real affection that they spoke of "Now Then."

"Are you calling us?" demanded Retta, opening her curtain a little and peering out.

Her alcove was at the end of the postscript with Grace's across the way.

"I am, miss, and it's best for you that you hurry up and come with me. Now then, I've no time to wait."

"Oh," said Retta, and then some whispering went on and before long Grace and she came out and marched past the rest of the girls with their heads in the air.

"Are they going to catch it, Now Then?" asked Peggy and Katie nodded her head vigorously.

The girls went to their alcoves to unpack and Gail and Peggy joined them.

"What do you think of Brookside as far as you've seen it?" they asked.

"It's heavenly, all but those two girls," replied Merry, "and I have a sort of a feeling that they will be all right after a while."

"Oh, let's forget them," said Gail. "We've been talking class officers this afternoon and Peggy and I think Hope ought to be the president of our class. What do you three think about it?"

"Oh, heavenly!" agreed Merry. "Don't you think so, girls?" and she turned to Pam and Joy.

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"Of course," they said together, "but let's surprise her about it, because I know she doesn't guess it now," went on Joy.

"And who will be treasurer?" asked Peggy.

"Either you or Gail," replied Pam. "We're new girls and we ought not to hold office and besides you know all about these things."

"Well, who shall we ask for class teacher," Gail continued. "Of course, Cherry and Peggy and I want Miss Dix but we're not sure about you four."

"Oh, I want Miss Dix, too," said Merry. "She's my favorite teacher, and the rest of you have simply got to agree."

"Oh, we agree all right, don't we Pam?" exclaimed Joy. "She is our postscript teacher and it would make it awfully nice to have her for Class Teacher too."

"Then that's settled unofficially because Hope is sure to agree with you," said Peggy.

There was a timid knock on the door and Cherry came in at their invitation.

"Girl's, I'm bursting to tell you something, but something inside me tells me I mustn't so I won't," she said.

"Oh, I bet I know what it was," said Gail.

"Miss Little's made Retta and Grace apologize to you. She always does. It's her way of showing that she thinks you are absolutely in the right."

"Gail, however did you guess? It was terribly solemn and I wanted to cry but I thought I'd done enough of that for one day," Cherry went on, laughing nervously.

"I should say you had but there goes the dressing bell and we must skip. See you later, girls; be sure and look your prettiest to-night," and Gail and Peggy went to their own alcoves.

Cherry followed them and they heard her singing so they knew that she had a dress to wear at any rate.

"Oh, bother," called out Pam a few minutes later, "I forgot my toothbrush, did you, Joy?"

"Yes, I did. Don't you remember we left them out to brush our teeth with after luncheon and then forgot them," Joy called back.

"Well, that's a terrible calamity," came Miss Dix's laughing voice. "If you are really good and eat your supper properly I'll take you down to the village after chapel and we'll buy some new ones."

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"Oh, how heavenly," came from Merry's alcove. "I wish I'd forgotten mine, too."

Just then Hope dashed in and everybody turned to help her dress as she was very late. The last snapper was snapped just as the supper bell rang.

"You're in luck," said Peggy, as the line formed in the Assembly Hall. "Miss Dix could have easily gone alone to the village or with one of the other teachers."

"Oh, she's a darling; there's no doubt about that," said Joy, and Pam nodded for the silence bell rang at that minute.

After dinner there was just time to go to the village and make their purchases before the homesick party began.

"Good evening, Mr. Darder," said Miss Dix as they entered the drug store. "Here are two new girls who forgot their toothbrushes in the excitement of coming to Brookside."

"Well, now," replied Mr. Darder looking over his spectacles, no one had ever seen him look through them and were forced to the conclusion that he wore them for ornament. "Well, now, that doesn't surprise me at all," he said and his voice was like a little bird's chirp.

He pulled out a drawer full of toothbrushes and went on chirping to Miss Dix.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked. "The afternoon flyer was derailed ten miles out of town and all the gold for the city bank was stolen."

"Was anyone hurt?" asked Miss Dix and the bald head nodded.

"The guard was shot and the brakeman and conductor badly injured. Shame, ain't it?" he went on.

"Did the bandits get away?" demanded Miss Dix.

"Clean away, they are hiding, some say, in the neighborhood, and some say not, can't tell. Hope they don't go to holding up the stores around here. Well young ladies have you decided which brushes you want, cause here's another customer," he finished briskly as a man entered the store.

"Isn't he a darling?" asked Joy as they went back through the dark to school.

"Yes," said Miss Dix but she was thinking of the holdup.

The homesick party was a unique affair. When the girls entered the school room they saw that the chairs had been arranged in twos

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all the way around the room and the reason was soon explained.

Each old girl had one of the pairs of chairs and a list of names of new girls. She went through the list and invited the girls in turn to come and sit with her for five minutes. In this way every new girl met every old one and had a chance for a little chat with her.

When refreshment time came the two quartettes found themselves together and compared notes.

"You are much the nicest new girls here," said Edna to Joy and Pam and Merry, "and March and I are proud that you come from Birchville."

"Have you had a good time?" asked Gloria.

"Heavenly," said Merry.

"I feel like an old girl already," said Pam.

"I wonder if the boys are as happy as we are?" asked Joy and Miss Dix was thinking:

"I'm the luckiest teacher in the school to have such a dandy dormitory. I sort of wish they'd choose me for their class teacher but I don't expect they will."

CHAPTER VIII

THE BANDITS

DAYS flashed by in rapid succession, each one molding the thoughts and actions of the girls at Brookside into a mold of its own and casting out those who refused to take shape.

Retta and Grace, after Miss Little's lecture, had been quite docile but as the weeks passed they had gathered around them a few girls of their own stamp and had sulked.

Miss Little hated to admit defeat but she faced it in these two who refused absolutely to adopt Brookside customs and manners. She was giving the matter serious thought when a knock at her door interrupted her.

The intruder was Cissie Doran and she looked expectant.

"Well, my child, what is it?" demanded Miss Little.

"It's about the picnic, Miss Little," Cissie said, smiling. "If this weather holds we could go to-morrow."

"To-morrow, eh?" repeated Miss Little, and she looked out of the window. "Yes, to-morrow ought to be a lovely day. We'll settle on it for a picnic. You and Sally go down at once and tell Mandy to order the usual food and while you're about it see if you can find Katie and send her to me."

Cissie knew she was dismissed but she hesitated and then blurted out: "You're coming with us, aren't you Miss Little? Please say you will. It's never any fun without you."

"Nice child," commented Miss Little. "Yes, I'll come if you think the girls have a good time with me along."

"Of course we do; do you remember the day we played hide and go seek and you played with us. Let's do it again this year," Cissie begged.

"I'm getting too old for games, I'm afraid, but we'll see; now run along and call Katie for me."

Cissie found Katie in the sewing room and sent her to Miss Little, then she went on to find Sally and the other last class girls and with them went to interview Mandy.

"Gerry, you make the poster," Cissie as president of the class directed.

"Well, somebody tell me what subject because I'm no good at thinking things out," Gerry replied. She was a fair girl with lots of talent but little originality.

"Here come two of the second class girls," Sally said, as Edna and Marcia came down the hall arm in arm. "Let's ask them for a suggestion."

"We want help for the picnic poster," said Cissie. "We've always been original before and we want to continue so. Give us an idea that isn't a picture of a girl eating a sandwich. They've had that for years."

"Draw a picture of Appetite stalking along the seashore," suggested Edna and the others laughed.

Marcia was the only one who took the idea seriously. "I have it," she said at last, "draw a picture of a luncheon basket and just creeping out of the top, a sausage with legs like a dog."

"I could never do that," wailed Gerry. "I couldn't imagine a sausage crawling around on legs."

"Well, it has to be done and the last class has enough to do with the food to prepare, so suppose you do it, March, you always draw

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comic things from choice and you're just the one."

Flattered and uneasy March agreed and as Edna went off to practice she made her way to the art room. It was a square box of a room and had windows on three sides.

She worked all afternoon and succeeded in making a really funny drawing. Miss Doty came in to put away some drawing materials; she had been out on the dunes all afternoon. She took one look at the picture and snatched it away from March.

"Child, child, why didn't you tell me you had this vein of humor; here you've been struggling along with the class when you ought to be in a class by yourself. What's this for? But, of course, I see it's for the picnic. Was it your idea, too?"

"Oh, yes," replied March now thoroughly excited. "I know a lot of funny things I want to draw but I've been afraid to for fear you wouldn't like it."

"Tell me what you want to draw most," demanded Miss Doty.

"A caricature of Mr. Darder, the funny little man at the drug store," Marcia told her.

They were discussing the possibility of

drawing Mr. Darder when they heard a faint shriek through the open window.

"Was that some one crying for help?" demanded Miss Doty.

"I think it was," replied Marcia. "It came from the road. Look, Miss Doty, does that look like some one lying in the driveway at the gate."

The sun was setting and the branches of the trees cast eerie shadows upon the road so that it was difficult to see whether it was a human form lying in the middle of the road or not.

"I certainly heard a scream. We'd better go and investigate at once," declared Miss Doty.

Marcia felt a glow of excitement steal over her as they hurried down the stairs and out onto the roadway. It was pleasurable excitement, for in the back of her mind was the fixed thought that the shadow lying on the road was nothing but the shadow of a tree. Still it might be somebody and the thought was exciting. Neither she nor Miss Doty were prepared for what they found.

Lying in a huddled heap, her arm thrown out as if to protect something, was Katie.

"Run to Dr. Gillies's house quickly,"

gasped Miss Doty, "and then run to the school for the nurse and tell Miss Little. I'll do what I can until you come back."

All Marcia's pleasurable anticipation was turned to cold horror and her fright gave her wings to fly to the doctor's little cottage. Fortunately she found him at home and he ran to the spot in the road that she pointed to.

"I'll go for Miss Carter," she called in a scared voice and raced to the school. Miss Carter was the nurse, a fat, motherly person who had never been known to be ruffled.

"What's all this excitement for, dearie?" she asked as Marcia rang the bell to the infirmary.

"Oh, Miss Carter, come quick," Marcia exclaimed. "Now Then, Katie, has been hurt by the road and she looks awful."

"Poor dear, I'll be with her in a jiffy," and Miss Carter picked up her emergency bag and slipped on a cap and still with that unruffled way she followed Marcia to the door and down the road.

They had straightened Katie out and she was lying with her head on Miss Doty's lap.

"Somebody call Miss Little," said the doctor, and Marcia went back to the school again,



Neither she nor Miss Doty were prepared for what they found.

this time trying to compose what she would say to break the news gently to Miss Little.

All her chosen speeches went astray however for she met the principal of Brookside face to face in the corridor and blurted it out.

"Come quick, Miss Little," she cried. "Katie has met with a terrible accident and she's lying on the road"—

Miss Little did not let her finish but ran quickly out of the house and down the road to the little group of people who stood beside Katie.

They carried her on a shutter to the infirmary and left the doctor and Miss Carter with her. Miss Little and Miss Doty and Marcia stood outside the closed door and waited.

"What could have happened to her?" asked Miss Doty. "She couldn't have fallen and hurt herself like that."

"She was hit in the head and knocked down and left for dead," Miss Little said angrily.

"By whom and what for?" demanded Miss Doty. Marcia stood speechless with surprise.

"By a bandit or a ruffian, and he stole the payroll; that's what she was down in the village for. She always does my banking for me," explained Miss Little, and the other two

gave a start of surprise, they had never dreamed of such a thing.

The doctor came out of the room.

"She is conscious and she seems terribly troubled about a black bag," he said.

"Of course, poor soul, she would be, as if it mattered as long as she is all right," Miss Little said. "Perhaps if I talked to her it would comfort her."

"Yes, if you will, please." The doctor stood aside for Miss Little to pass and she turned to Marcia and Miss Doty.

"I can't thank you now nor ever probably, not adequately, anyhow; you'll just have to believe how grateful I am," and there were tears in her eyes as she spoke.

"Oh, Miss Little, please"—began Marcia and Miss Doty said "nonsense."

"I want school to go on just as though this hasn't happened," she continued. "You may tell the girls and please post a notice to the effect that no one is to leave the grounds. Take my place at the table to-night, Miss Doty, I won't be down," and she walked into the sick room and the doctor closed the door gently.

Miss Doty went to post the notice and Marcia went to find Edna and the other girls.

CHAPTER IX

THE MIDNIGHT FEAST

JOY and Pam were talking it over that evening after the silence bell. They spoke in whispers but Miss Dix heard them. She heard Merry and Hope too and she knew that Peggy and Gail were in Cherry's room but like the wise woman she was she said nothing.

This was an exceptional night and excitement was abroad in the land.

"Pam, dear, there's not the slightest danger of a bandit coming in here to-night, and if one did he couldn't very well hit us all on the head." Joy was trying to be reassuring while secretly relishing the idea of a midnight attack. Hers was a nature that delighted in adventure and it was that keynote of her character that had made her run away with the gypsies at the age of six.

Nothing frightened Joy. It was Pam, who, adventurous though she was in some things, feared bodily hurt.

"Joy, I believe you'd welcome a bandit and give him a piece of cracker spread with peanut butter." Pam was so disgusted that she spoke out loud and the rest of the postscript snorted for a minute and then burst out laughing.

"Girls, if you all promise to stop talking and go to sleep I'll let you talk through dressing hour in the morning," came Miss Dix's pleading voice.

"All right, Miss Dix," came half a dozen voices; the only two that were absent were Retta's and Grace's.

Things quieted down and by and by everybody was fast asleep and dreaming of bandits. At about a quarter to one there was a sound of bouncing up and down on a bed and then a wild yell.

"I have him, Mabs, I have him," came Merry's voice and the postscript sat up to a girl and shivered.

A minute later Miss Dix in hastily donned bathrobe was in Merry's cove to find her pummeling a pillow and shouting victoriously.

"There, there, dear, it's all right," she comforted, and Merry woke up to find Hope and Joy and Pam all looking in the curtain at

her and to feel Miss Dix shaking her gently.

"Oh, how heavenly, it was only a dream," Merry said and then everybody began to laugh.

White robed figures began to fill the corridor. Edna and Marcia and Faith and Gloria arrived from the lower floor to find out what the trouble was and the frightened seniors sent Sally and Cissie to inquire into the rumpus.

"Girls, go back to your dorms and report that everything is all right. Merry just had a nightmare."

"It would be Merry," laughed Gloria, and the rest agreed.

"Mercy, I can't go back to sleep after that," Hope announced, "and I'm starving hungry."

Miss Dix knew it was strictly against rules but these were her children to bring up as she saw fit, and besides she was hungry, too.

"Quick, who's got any peanut butter and crackers?" she demanded. "I'll let you each have three crackers apiece, if you promise to hurry up and not talk about it to the other girls."

Swift as lightning the peanut butter was produced and they sat on Merry's bed and floor and window box, and with their knees

pulled up to their chins sat and talked in whispers so as not to disturb Retta and Grace who had slept serenely through all the noise. Peggy and Gail and Cherry came in for their share, and when the three crackers were eaten and it was time to go to bed again they went without a murmur, and there was not so much as a word spoken after the whispered "good mornings" had been said.

After the rising bell only Retta and Grace spoke and as they were down at the end of the postscript they couldn't be heard. They wondered why the others were not taking advantage of the permission to talk.

At breakfast Miss Little appeared looking tired and worried, but she made the announcement that Katie was doing very nicely and that she saw no reason for postponing the picnic.

So Marcia's drawing went up on the board and her class was very proud of her.

"We'll have the best paper in years when we get to be seniors," said Lee Benton, "with Edna as editor and you as art editor."

"We'll beat this year all hollow," remarked Hildy Landis, "but I wouldn't tell them so, they might not like it."

As chief of sports Marcia had a good deal to do in organizing the picnic. There was to be a paper chase first and the hares were to lead eventually to the beach. But they were not to stray too far away and they had to take a teacher with them as the bandit might be in hiding among the caves along the waterfront. The shore there was rocky and sandy and there were caves that the Root twins had discovered with Wally Chalmers the year before at commencement that had made them miss the exercises.

Hope was the leader of the hares this time and they started off at a jog trot and made a wide detour into the country and fetched up at the beach a little north of the caves.

There they found the hounds waiting for them and the fire almost made for the roasting of the sausages and bacon.

"Well, I like that," Hope began. "This is the first hare and hound chase I've ever been on when the hounds got in first."

"Oh, we knew you'd have to end up here, so we came direct," Marcia told her. "What was the use of following you all around Robin Hood's barn?"

"And to think we doubled our tracks so as

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to mislead you; you're a lot of lazybones," said Joy.

"We get most to eat because we're hungrier than you are," Pam announced and there was a general move to the luncheon baskets.

They took long sticks and sharpened the ends and used them for skewers to roast the sausages and bacon and when they were crisp and brown they popped them in split buttered rolls and ate them with relish.

There were sandwiches too and thermos bottles full of hot chocolate.

After the meal was over and they had all helped to pack up the lunch basket they organized a game of hide and go seek.

Marcia and Edna were "it" first and they counted to five hundred by ones to give the others a good chance to find a hiding place. They went in couples and Joy and Pam went off together.

"We'll hide in the cave," suggested Pam.

"Oh, they will look there first," said Joy, "but come on, we'll go anyway; it's exciting to hide in a cave. . . ."

They went down to the water's edge and crawled in a low cave that had a sandy floor. It was dark and eerie and at first they couldn't

see very well but after a few minutes they became accustomed to the light and noticed a slab of rock tilted up against one end of the cave.

"Let's move this and hide behind it," suggested Pam.

"I doubt if we can," replied Joy, "but we can try," and they tugged at the stone and found to their amazement that it moved easily. Joy looked at it in wonder.

"That's the first rock I ever knew to move as easily as that," she said and Pam rapped it with her knuckles.

"It isn't a rock at all, Joy; listen, it sounds like tin."

Pam rapped it again and then they pulled it back and found that it had been used to cover a small hole in the wall just big enough for a man to crawl through.

Joy took command at once.

"Pam," she announced, "somebody has put that imitation rock there to hide this entrance, let's go and see what it was," and she crawled through the opening and stood up in an inside cave or room for it had wooden supports and formed sort of a hut with a tarpaulin roof.

It was too dark at first to see anything but

Joy felt around and finally her hand rested on an iron box.

"Oh," she gasped and Pam close behind her, demanded:

"What is it, Joy? I'm scared to death in here."

"So am I, now," admitted Joy. "Pam do you realize we've found the bandits' cave?"

"How do you know?" asked Pam excitedly. She half thought Joy was playing a game.

"Because I've found one of those boxes that they carry money in. At least they do in the movies, and oh, Pam, *look*, what I've found now," and Joy started back for the outer cave carrying a small black bag.

She had not crawled more than a foot back when the sound of lapping water came to her and she put out her hand.

"Pam," she cried in terror, "the tide has come in and we are stranded here. What shall we do?"

They crawled back into the hut and sat down clutching each other in fear. But it was not like Joy to be afraid long. She scrambled to her feet and began feeling about her feverishly.

"It's all right," she said at last. "Every

thing in this room is dry so the tide doesn't come up this far."

"Are you sure?" demanded Pam, and Joy put her arm around her.

"Positive, darling; don't be scared, this is kind of fun."

Pam shuddered and then decided to make the best of it.

Meanwhile outside the game of hide and go seek was still in progress. Everyone had been accounted for but Joy and Pam and it had turned into a general hunt.

After unsuccessful searchings back and forth among the rocks they were forced to report to Miss Dix.

"Perhaps they did go into the cave," she said jumping up and racing towards the other end of the beach.

"But surely they know that's forbidden," exclaimed Hope.

"I didn't know it was forbidden," said Merry almost in tears, "I thought of going there but Hopey said we couldn't and that's the first time I knew it was out of bounds."

Miss Dix looked terrified. "Oh, children!" she exclaimed, "Miss Little always announces it the day of the picnic and to-day she was so

busy she forgot. How hideous! What shall we do?"

Followed by the girls Miss Dix dashed to the cave and began to call frantically:

"Joy! Pam!"

"Yes, Miss Dix," came the reply from under the sand.

"Are you safe, girls?" Miss Dix shouted, "or is the water still coming in?"

"It's still coming in but it won't touch us," came Joy's muffled voice; "it's dry in the hut."

"What hut is she talking about?" demanded Miss Dix but none of the girls knew.

"Please dig us out," came from Pam imploringly.

"I'll go get help," said Miss Dix, and she ran as fast as she could in the direction of the village.

The girls watched the water and called cheery things down to the prisoners.

"The tide was almost in when we got here," Miss Doty said. "It's about time for it to turn."

They waited but the water seemed to creep in farther every minute.

"They must have found another cave," sug-

gested Cissie Doran. "Maybe we could dig to them."

"Wait until Miss Dix comes back; we don't want to smother them.

As she spoke an automobile came towards them at a breakneck speed and before it had stopped Dr. Gillies and Miss Dix jumped out followed by men with spades. They had been digging in the road.

"Where are you?" shouted the doctor.

"Here," came a faint voice, and the doctor looked puzzled.

"Can you breathe?" was the next question.

"No," came the stifled reply.

The doctor directed the men to dig a small hole. They did it quickly and one of them hit the tarpaulin top to the tent with his spade. There was a crack of breaking timber and the earth below them gave way and the sand poured into the hole.

"Dig, men, dig," the doctor cried and grabbed a spade.

The sand was soon off and two wriggling bodies showed under the canvas.

Miss Dix and the doctor ripped it away and found Joy and Pam very much alive and only slightly hurt.

Joy's leg dragged when she tried to get up and Pam had a cut on the head.

They discovered then that whoever had made the hut had built it out from the back entrance of the cave and then had covered it with sand.

It was Joy who finally dropped the bomb-shell.

"Get Katie's bag and the box from the train," she said.

Only the doctor knew she had not gone crazy and he stopped in his investigation long enough to ask her what she was talking about.

"We found Katie's shopping bag and a big strong box," Joy told him.

The spades started to dig again and the men behind them worked with a will. They unearthed the bag first and Miss Doty exclaimed:

"It is Katie's, I have seen it hundreds of times. Doctor this must be the bandits' cave."

"It is, my friend," the doctor replied solemnly. "We must notify the sheriff at once and the railroad."

The girls were making a great fuss about Joy and Pam and the doctor interfered.

"Home and bed for both of you. Here

jump into my car," he directed, and with the girls walking on either side they drove slowly back to the school.

Miss Carter put them in a room together and Miss Little came to see them.

"Have you ever read the list of rules on the door of your wardrobe?" she inquired smiling through tears.

Both Joy and Pam admitted that they never had read it clear to the end.

"Well," said Miss Little "the fourth rule says 'Beware of the rocks on the shore and do not play in the caves; the tide rises quickly and makes them dangerous.' "

"But if we hadn't we would never have discovered the bandits' treasure," laughed Pam.

"No, and I have another idea," said Joy, "only I won't tell a single person about it until after it's all over."

"Well," said Miss Little, "I blame myself for not having cautioned you before the picnic. You might have been drowned," and two large and unaccustomed tears gathered in her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks as she patted the two hands on the white spreads.

CHAPTER X

CLASS MEETING

“**H**AVE you finished your French for tomorrow?” asked Merry as she and Hope met Joy and Pam in the corridor by the music cabinet.

“More important things than French to-day,” said Hope seriously. “Gail and Peggy and I are going to call a class meeting and somehow or other we have to make Retta and Grace come to it.”

The two girls just mentioned were still sulking and though the members of their class had tried in a half-hearted way to be nice to them they had not succeeded in bringing about a reconciliation.

“Let me speak to them,” said Merry unexpectedly. “We’ve really been sort of mean to them and I think maybe if I were really nice they might come round.”

“Go, by all means,” said Hope, “and with our blessings.”

“We’ll wait for you in history room,” Joy

called and Merry danced off down the corridor.

Merry found the two girls cleaning out their bureau drawers, the curtains pulled back between their alcoves. They looked surprised when she entered.

"Hello, you two," Merry began hopefully. "We are going to have a class meeting in history room, so hurry up with your tidying and come on."

"I'm not going," said Grace. "Retta can do as she likes."

"Oh, I wouldn't go to it for worlds," said Retta.

"Oh, dear," Merry sank back on the bed looking the picture of woe. "Oh, dear," she sighed again. "I was sure if we were nice to you, you'd be nice too."

"Well, we won't," replied Grace flatly.

"Anyway I'm not going to be horrid," said Merry. "Oh, what a cute pocketbook," she exclaimed, as Retta took one out of her drawer and laid it on the bed beside her.

Retta was flattered at once.

"Like it?" she asked self-consciously. "It came from Paris."

"What are those in that box? Beads?"

Merry went on. "Give them here and I'll string them for you."

Now Retta and Grace were human and it would have taken a very inhuman person indeed to withstand Merry, for she was determined to march the girls to the class meeting.

"I haven't anything to string them on," said Retta ungraciously but nevertheless she was beginning to thaw.

"Wait a shake," said Merry. "I have some dental floss in my room. That'll do. I'll go and get it."

When she had left the alcove Retta and Grace looked at each other.

"She's a nice kid," said Retta.

"I like her better than the others," said Grace. "I suppose we'll have to go to the old class meeting."

"I suppose so," Retta agreed. "If we don't they can send us to Coventry again," and a look of fear came into her face.

Merry bounced back with the dental floss. She threw it on the bed and then consulted her wrist watch.

"I can't do it until after the class meeting," she said. "Come on, are you ready to go? I'll help you to tidy up after."

The girls looked up at her speechless. Merry caught them each by an arm.

"Oh, come on, be sports," she begged as she smiled at them.

Now there is something curious in the use of the word "sport." To be told to be a good sport puts one on his mettle. Merry knew that the two girls before her considered themselves good sports and she knew if she could present going to the class meeting in the light of a sporty thing to do, they could be counted upon to do it.

"I don't see why it's being a sport," said Retta, half convinced.

"Doing things that you don't want to do but that are the right things to do is being sporty," said Merry, "and you two certainly don't want to come to the class meeting. But you've simply got to get it out of your minds that we don't like you because we do, and oh, girls, let's have the best second class in the history of Brookside."

Merry could have kept on indefinitely but Retta held up her hand.

"Stop talking and we'll come," she said.

The victory was Merry's and she swelled with pride. An arm linked in an arm of each

of the girls, she escorted them down to the history room.

"Here we are, isn't it heavenly?" she began.

"Hello, Retta; hello, Grace," the girls chorused; "come over and sit by me," Joy invited.

"No Retta and Grace are going to sit beside me," said Cherry and she moved over on the form to make room for them.

The two girls sat down bewildered at so much cordiality.

"Let's vote first," suggested Gail. "Here's paper and pencil and the names of the officers, president, secretary-treasurer, and correspondent."

"You've forgotten class teacher," said Peggy, and Gail added that to her list.

The girls wrote in silence for a few minutes and then handed in their papers.

There were six votes for Hope and one for Gail and one for Retta and one for Grace. The two girls had voted for each other and Hope had voted for Gail. Miss Little disapproved of new girls holding office and that is the reason Merry, Pam, Joy and Cherry were not mentioned.

"Hope is president of the class," exclaimed Merry. "Oh, three cheers for Hopey," and they were given with a will, Retta and Grace joining in half-heartedly.

Gail won the election for secretary-treasurer and Peggy as correspondent. Miss Dix was chosen class teacher by all the girls except Retta and Grace who choose Mam'selle.

"Sit at the desk, Hope, and act like a president," said Peggy and Hope took her place behind the teacher's desk.

"Girls," she begged, "let's make this a record year. Nobody even knows that second class exists but it will be different this year. We have four friends in the third class and they will help us out when they can, for parties I mean and things like that. Let's make them see we are important and do something big. We are more or less good students and we've got to keep up our class record, and let's go in strong for gym. We might even get a girl on the sub team if we work real hard. Retta, you and Grace are good at athletics; perhaps you can make the sub team."

There was a little coolness in Hope's voice as she spoke to the two girls, for she could not

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bring herself to be really nice to them. It was hard for her to forgive.

"We'll try," said Retta doubtfully.

"Let's go and ask Miss Dix to be class teacher," suggested Peggy. "I know she likes our class and I'm almost sure she will say yes."

They walked arm and arm to Miss Dix's door and knocked gently. Miss Dix called a cheery come and Hope lead in the procession.

"Miss Dix," she began when they had crowded into the little room. "We have come to ask you if you will be our class president—I mean our class teacher. I have president on the brain because I've just been made it and I am awfully proud."

"Why, congratulations, Hope," exclaimed Miss Dix. "I'm awfully glad and as for being your class teacher I'd have died of a broken heart if you hadn't asked me."

"Oh, Miss Dix, we are so glad," cried Peggy. "We knew, of course, that you were teacher for the last class last year and they are sure to want you this year but you'll stay with us, won't you?"

"Indeed I will," replied Miss Dix, "and now let's celebrate by making hot chocolate

because I have a sponge cake from home and it's just dying to be eaten."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Joy. "I adore sponge cake."

"It's about time mummy sent us a box, don't you think?" Pam inquired.

Miss Dix brought out her small electric stove and they put the evaporated milk on to heat. It took a long time and while they waited they made plans for the coming year.

A knock at the door interrupted them. It was Cissie Doran and she stopped in amazement at the sight that met her eyes.

"What's all this?" she demanded.

"Miss Dix is our class teacher; isn't it too heavenly?" Merry explained.

"But," began Cissie and then stopped.

"I know," exclaimed Joy who always thought several minutes ahead of any of the others. "You came to ask Miss Dix the same thing."

"Yes, I did; won't you lend her to us," replied Cissie. "You have two more years to have her and this is our last."

"Never," shouted the second class. "She's ours."

"Well, you are selfish," returned Cissie,

“but I don’t know that I blame you. Let’s ask Miss Dix what she thinks about it.”

Miss Dix, appealed to, smiled and shook her head.

“Much as I love the last class, these are my girls and I must stick to them. ‘Not that I love Caesar the less but that I love Rome more,’ ” and she laughed.

“You can quote Julius Caesar all you want to but just the same I think it’s dreadful. What shall I tell the girls when I go back? They are all waiting for Miss Dix and to find that the second class has stolen a march on us will be too awful.”

“Stay and have a cup of chocolate first and then break the news,” laughed Miss Dix but Cissie shook her head.

“No, I return defeated,” said Cissie with pretended tragedy.

In the middle of the chocolate drinking, there came another interruption. This time it was Katie and she was looking for Joy. She was completely recovered and insisted upon going back to the bank as if nothing unusual had happened.

“Now then,” she began briskly, “Miss Little wants you in the office at once.”

Joy had a clear conscience but just the same the summons made her nervous.

"What is it, Katie?" she wanted to know.

It was not once in a month that the girls saw Katie smile and when she did it was not a pretty sight for her smile was a grin and it distorted her homely features. She smiled now and replied:

"Now then, there's a gentleman to see you and I can't tell you any more. . . ."

"Pops," exclaimed Joy, and then her face fell. "No, if it were Pops he'd want you, too, Pam."

"Now then, didn't I say that he wanted you both?" protested Katie. "Of course he wants you both, when I speak to one of you I always mean the two of you and you ought to know that by this time."

"Then it is Pops," exclaimed Pam and she was just about to race from the room when Katie held her back.

"It is not your father," she said smiling again. "Some one more exciting than that."

"But it couldn't be," protested Joy and Pam.

Katie thus contradicted became cross again. "Now then, hurry along with you and you're

to change your dresses first," she directed.

They changed into their challis dresses at Miss Dix's suggestion and with her help, and hurried down stairs still hoping that it might be "Pops" who wanted them.

But a strange man rose to greet them on their entrance to Miss Little's office. Miss Little introduced them:

"Mr. Stewart, these are the two girls who found the cave. This is Joy Payton and this is Pamela Hotchkiss. Suppose you tell them what you told me and see what they have to say."

"Well, young ladies," began Mr. Stewart; "there is considerable reward offered for information about the bandits and I think it is yours by rights."

"Oh, I don't want a reward," said Pam hurriedly.

"I do," announced Joy unexpectedly, "but," she added, "I don't want money."

"And what may I ask, do you want?" inquired Mr. Stewart.

"I want you, please to give that piece of land that you were going to use as a freight yard to Miss Little," she said all at once and when she had finished she drew a deep breath.

"Joy, who told you about that land?" demanded Miss Little.

Joy considered for a minute. "Oh, it was Edna or Marcia or one of the girls, and we thought how awful that would be, so please give it to Miss Little for our reward," Joy ended very seriously.

Mr. Stewart looked at them for a minute and burst out laughing.

"The young miss doesn't care how she upsets the company's plans, does she? That's the president's pet scheme, too, but, bless me if I don't arrange it somehow."

Miss Little was laughing too.

"That's all, girls, you may go upstairs again," said she and turned to Mr. Stewart. "You must not take this seriously Mr. Stewart," they heard her say as they closed the door behind them.

"Well, it was no use," Joy said forlornly, "and I don't know whether Miss Little is cross or not but anyway I tried."

"Don't let's say anything about it," said Pam, "to the girls I mean."

"Oh, not a word," replied Joy. "We'll just say they offered us a reward and we refused it and that will be that."

They found the girls in Retta's and Grace's alcoves and told them about it, leaving out Joy's suggestion.

Then to change the subject Pam asked:

"What are you doing, Merry?" and Merry replied, "Oh, I'm stringing Retta's beads," but she did not add how those very beads had won the day for a united second class.

Girls who are the right sort know when to keep things to themselves.

CHAPTER XI

THE LECTURE

JOY heard no more about the reward and soon forgot all about it. There were so many things to do in the course of a school day.

When this chapter opens November had come and with it a dismal day of rain and snow. Sleet battered upon the housetop and a dreary sight was the outlook from the windows.

“What shall we do?” demanded Marcia. “We can’t go out and the last class has the assembly hall and the gym is filled with first class trying out for the sub team. I suppose I ought to be there, but what’s the use? The first class never make the team and Miss Dix can manage them herself far better without me.”

It was plain to be seen that the chief of sports was cross and in need of cheering.

“Let’s find Joy and Pam and Hope and Merry,” suggested Gloria, they’re sure to be

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up to something. You go and get them Ed; tell them Faith and I are bored to death and that Marcia has a grouch."

"I haven't," denied Marcia, "but I haven't heard from home this week and I'm worried."

"Let's go see if we have any mail," suggested Gloria. "I saw Now Then coming home with it in history period and there was a little boy with her carrying a big box."

"I'll go," said Edna good naturedly. "Remember I have my music lesson this afternoon, so don't do anything too exciting while I'm away."

"No fear," said Marcia. "There won't be anything to do."

Edna left the alcove and went down to the mail boxes. There was one for each class and she found that the looked for letter for Marcia had come.

A box stood on the table below the mail boxes and Edna looked to see if it could be for any of them, but discovered it was directed to Joy and Pam.

She dashed off to tell them, for a box from their home meant something for all eight of them. At Joy's alcove she stopped and tapped on the wardrobe.

"Come in," called Joy, and she entered to find both girls deep in books. "Oh, hello, Ed. What brings you here? We haven't seen you for simply ages and we were wishing you'd come up this afternoon; we are so bored that there wasn't a thing to do but read *Silas Marner*."

"There's a big box for somebody on the hall table and I think it's for you," said Edna mysteriously.

"For somebody on the hall table, how extraordinary," came a voice so like the English teacher's that Edna looked at the two girls in despair.

"Excuse me, I meant on the hall table for somebody," she corrected herself and Hope pulled back the curtain and Merry giggled beside her.

"Oh, you imps!" said Edna. "We won't give you any of the box from home for that."

"Yes, we will, too," laughed Pam. "I wouldn't have missed your face for a farm; can't Hope imitate Miss Sands to the life?"

"That's no doubt very clever of Hope but hardly respectful" came the real voice of Miss Sands. This time there was no mistaking it and the lady herself soon appeared, her head

poked around the curtain and a look of stern disapproval on her face.

Hope smiled a disarming smile. "Well, you see, Miss Sands," she began, "I thought if I made Edna think it was you it would impress itself upon her the more."

"And why need I impress Edna?" inquired Miss Sands.

Hope hesitated and Edna came to the rescue.

"I told Joy there was a big box for somebody on the hall table and Hope corrected me. I know of course I should have said on the hall table for somebody."

"Well, Hope, I am at least gratified that you noticed the error and this time I shall overlook the impertinence. Edna, write the sentence fifty times for me and hand it in tonight" and Miss Sands turned to leave.

"Oh, please," began Edna, "I have a music lesson this afternoon and two practice periods during study hour"—

"And there is a lecture on bird life tonight," Hope put in. "I saw it posted on the bulletin board as I came by."

"Oh, how deadly," sighed Merry.

"Merry you may write the word 'imperti-

nence' fifty times," said Miss Sands. "The professor is a very dear friend of mine and I can assure you his lecture will be highly entertaining." And leaving destruction in her wake Miss Sands departed.

"And it's all my fault," said Hope dismally. "Girls I'll write them for you."

"Never," laughed Merry. "She knows my scrawl too well, but we'll get even with you some other way, won't we, Ned?"

"Boiling in oil is too good for her," Edna replied laughing, too. "We won't let her have any chocolate cake if there's any in Pam and Joy's box."

"Cheer up, Hopey," said Joy. "It's the box on the hall table that has caused all the trouble. Come on, let's go down and discover what's in it."

Pam led the way and they found the box and bore it off to Gloria's alcove.

Faith heard the story from Pam of the descent of Miss Sands and the coming lecture. She looked very solemn and stared at Joy.

"Joy, can't you make a noise like a bird, any bird?" she asked.

Joy nodded. "Joe taught me," she said.

"Well, we don't want a lecture to-night and

I think I see how we can cut it short," and she whispered to Joy and the rest stood wondering.

Pam was busy opening the box. In it they found everything that a box should contain: a chicken broiled brown and some cranberry sandwiches, a chocolate cake and bottles of olives and nuts and peppermints.

"Put it away," said Faith, who always directed their doings with the art of a stage manager, "and we'll have it to-night after the lecturer has decided that he will be unable to continue his talk."

"But how?" chorused the girls and Faith replied:

"Never mind, Joy and I know and that's all that's necessary."

It is little short of wonderful the way news can travel through a school from just a hint given in the right quarter. Faith gave the time and it spread like wildfire, and a whisper went through the school that none were to laugh at anything they heard that night. The school did not know what was afoot but they gave their hearty coöperation knowing from whence the idea had sprung.

At seven o'clock Merry and Edna went into

the assembly hall to their desks and wrote diligently until their tasks were finished. It was Friday night and there was no study hour, the lecture was to take its place.

At seven-thirty the bell rang and the girls filled the hall all wondering what was going to happen.

On the stage of the assembly hall was a big chair and the space behind it was used for a prompter's box for theatricals. Everybody was so used to it that no one gave it a thought. Several back curtains were rolled up to the ceiling and when the professor came in he noticed them.

"Oh, may we have a woodland drop for our talk?" he asked in a high, querulous voice. "That would be too delightful."

Miss Little nodded to Faith who was sitting in the front row and she jumped up to obey her. Very tenderly she let the newest of the curtains down and it fell just before the big chair.

"Best thing that could have happened," Faith whispered to Gloria, and the lecture began.

"Dearest to our hearts because of all our little feathered friends it does not desert us,

is the little English sparrow, now thoroughly Americanized," began the professor, and stopped for faintly in back of him came the cheeping of sparrows talking in a friendly argument.

Miss Sands looked up and frowned; she was shortsighted and she thought the professor was imitating the birds himself. Miss Dix never moved a muscle of her face and neither did Miss Doty. The girls sat mute and expressionless and Miss Little looked surprised.

"And next we have the robin, dear little robin redbreast"—again the professor stopped and the notes of the robin's song came to him from the rear of the stage.

Was this some trick of fancy or had a stray robin lingered so late or had they arranged to have the sounds fit in with his speech? If they had he wished they hadn't as it made him excessively nervous. He left out what he had to say about the robin to go to the thrush to see if the bird answered. It did. The notes came clear and sweet always from just behind his left ear. Really this was most nerve racking. He skipped to the linnet and the bluebird and found that his lecture was all mixed up.

Miss Sands still continued to think it was the professor who was making these sounds and Miss Dix and Miss Doty had decided it was Joy by the simple process of locating everyone else but her in the hall. Miss Little knew some one was trying to hurry the lecturer through his tiresome talk but they were doing it so gracefully that she did not feel she must interfere. Miss Little overlooked many things.

After the bare mention of the humming bird and the red-winged blackbird the professor tottered to the edge of the platform and said good-night and the girls encored him from sheer relief, and gratitude for the rest of the evening was theirs and for the eight conspirators it meant chicken and chocolate layer cake.

As proof of their esteem they presented Joy with the drum stick and the largest piece of chocolate cake.

CHAPTER XII

BASKET BALL

BUT Miss Sands had no intention of letting the subject drop when she learned that it was not the professor who had made the bird noises. She went to Miss Little and complained.

“I really think the culprit should be punished,” she said crossly.

Miss Little sighed. She didn’t want to punish the culprit. She had rather enjoyed those birdlike notes and she thought it wonderful that they could come from a human throat. She intended to find out who it was and make her give a concert of her own. She knew it couldn’t be one of the old girls and she had puzzled her mind to figure out which one of the new girls it could be. She finally decided that it was Cherry.

Miss Little came into assembly hall the Saturday morning after the lecture and made an announcement from the platform:

“I want the girl who whistled like a bird

and upset the professor last night to report to my office immediately after study hour this morning," she said.

The two quartettes looked at each other and Joy smiled nervously.

"We'll all go," said Marcia when they had a chance to talk it over after the bell rang.

"No," said Joy. "I'm going by myself; I did it and I will take the consequences."

"Oh, but you won't," protested Faith; "it was my idea and we'll go together. Somehow I don't think Miss Little will be very cross."

They went down arm and arm to the office and Faith tapped boldly on the door.

"Come in," called Miss Little and they entered to find her seated at her desk as usual. She was so sure that the whistler was Cherry that she looked at the two girls and smiled. "What can I do for you to-day?" she asked.

"I whistled last night, Miss Little," said Joy, without a trace of fear in her voice.

"And I put her up to it," said Faith.

"Why?" asked Miss Little, point-blank.

"Because we knew the professor would talk till bedtime and we wanted to have a feast because Joy had just gotten a box from home."

Faith tried to look matter of fact but failed and looked guilty.

Miss Little was silent for a long time and then she asked another question.

"Where did you learn to whistle like that, Joy?"

"Joe taught me when I was with the gypsies," Joy replied, and there was pride in her voice.

"And she knows some wonderful gypsy dances, too," said Faith, "only you can't make her show off."

Another silence.

"I suppose you know it was very impertinent of you to spoil the professor's lecture?" Miss Little asked, "and I suppose you are properly sorry."

"But we had such a good time after, Miss Little," appealed Joy. "I can't say I'm sorry."

"Neither can I, Miss Little," said Faith, wondering what would happen next.

Miss Little looked at both girls and frowned. Then she delivered her verdict.

"Go back to the assembly hall and write a note to the professor apologizing for your behavior, and then go and tell Miss Sands that



She lectured them for half an hour.

you are sorry you upset her friend, and don't ever dare do such a thing again, do you understand?"

There was no appeal from one of Miss Little's verdicts and the girls turned to obey. They didn't mind writing the note to the professor but the interview with Miss Sands they knew would be most unpleasant.

It was. She lectured them for half an hour on the sin of impertinence and insisted upon seeing the letter they had written to the professor and rewrote it for them, making the apology more abject.

"Phew, I'm glad that's over," gasped Faith, "and now let's go find the others."

The others were waiting in Pam's alcove and Pam was in tears.

"Oh, Joy, was it perfectly awful?" she sobbed, and Joy laughed.

"It was pretty bad with Miss Sands but Miss Little was a dear; but somehow or other I'll remember what Miss Little said and I've almost forgotten what Miss Sands said, and yet she did all the talking," Joy replied honestly.

"I know that's always the way; Miss Little has a way of making a lasting impression,"

said Edna. "But, come on, what can we do to fill the day?"

"We've been neglecting the gym for long enough," said Marcia. "Let's all go and see if we can't get up a practice game; I know Hildy wants to play."

"So does Cherry," Pam added. She had stopped crying and was her own bright self again.

"We'll make Lee play, too; she makes a wonderful forward only she won't work."

"There's Gail and Peggy, too," said Hope. "Come on, let's get them."

They found the girls in the assembly hall and went away to the gym, a low white building about three hundred yards from the main school building and connected by an underground passage to be used in rainy weather.

Marcia did not play but sat on the side lines and watched the game. She knew that some of the girls before her would make the sub team and she was trying to figure out who was the most worthy.

"If I choose Joy without Pam it will break both their hearts, and the same with Hope and Merry; yet I can't see Merry in any position on the team nor Pam either. Guess I'll have

to talk it over with Faith, though if the school sees Joy do her Russian dances she's sure to make the drama society. Hello, what's this?" as Pam made a neat basket after an exceptionally clever pass by Merry who was at that moment wringing her hands and saying, "How heavenly, Pam, how simply heavenly!"

"Guess I'll have to put them all on the sub team and, of course, Hildy and Lee if I don't have to put them on the main team with all the seniors vowing they can't play basket ball this season," Marcia went on thinking to herself and the girls went on playing, little thinking that so much was at stake.

Merry was interrupted in the middle of a toss by Katie who just then came in looking for Joy.

"You're to go straight to the office," she said, and Joy turned to the girls in despair.

"More about that whistling, I'm afraid," she said.

"Never," said Faith with some heat. "Miss Little never brings up a thing she has punished you for."

"For which she has punished you," teased Hope; "but you are right Miss Little never punishes twice."

"Now then, come along," said Katie. "Don't keep her waiting."

"Yes, do go and find out," gasped Merry.

Joy turned to go, she had a sinking feeling that Miss Little was going to tell her that her gypsy training had made her too impertinent to stay at Brookside and she trembled in her boots.

But Miss Little was smiling when Joy entered her office. With her was Mr. Stewart of the railroad to whom Joy had talked about the reward.

"So here's the little lass," he said, holding out his hand to Joy. "Well, young lady, your request has gone through and here is your deed to the property. The president said you were to have anything you wanted. Shall I make it out to you or your father?" he asked.

Joy was so glad to see him that she wanted to hug him and here was her chance to do something for Miss Little.

"Oh, make it out to Miss Little, please," she begged. "I want it to belong to Brookside."

"Joy, dear, that is too great a gift," protested Miss Little. "You'd much better keep it and lend it to Brookside."

"No, please. I want to give it to you, Pops wrote me that I was not to take any reward for myself but he won't mind this I know."

"Well, you must consult him before you do it," insisted Miss Little. "Suppose you write to him to-morrow."

Joy was too impatient to think of waiting so long so she said appealingly:

"Can't I telephone him now?"

Miss Little considered the point but it was Mr. Stewart who decided it.

"Let the lassie telephone and then we can settle it to-day. I'm a very busy man."

"Very well," agreed Miss Little. "Go in and use the telephone on my little table," and she pointed to her sitting room which was off the office.

After a long wait Joy got through to Birchville and her father's voice came over the wire.

"Pops," said Joy, "this is me." Then she remembered it was a lucky thing Miss Sands was not there to hear her.

"Is there anything the matter?" came Geoffrey Hotchkiss's voice.

"No, Pops," Joy hastened to reassure him. "I want your advice. The Mr. Stewart whom

I wrote you about is here and he wants to give me that property next to the school that Miss Little wants and"—

Here Geoffrey interrupted.

"Have him make out the deed to Miss Little," he said.

"Oh, Pops, that's exactly what I knew you'd say. I wish Pam were here to talk to you, but she's in the gym."

"Go and get her," came Geoffrey's voice, "I'll tell them to reverse the charges."

Joy ran into the office. "Please, Miss Little, Pops wants to speak to Pam; may I go and get her?"

"Yes, hurry, and I'll talk to your father while you are gone." Miss Little nodded and away Joy flew to the gym where she yanked Pam away from the group of girls she was with and pulled her after her to the office.

Miss Little was just saying:—"can never thank you enough for your generosity," when Pam entered.

"Here's your daughter to speak to you."

"Oh, Pops, how thrilling! How are you and Mummy? Oh, but I wish I could see you as well as talk to you," Pam exclaimed.

Miss Little motioned Joy into her office and

handed her the receiver of the telephone that was an extension. Joy could hear her father's voice and was soon in the conversation.

"Mummy's over at Mrs. Winthrop's. You know, she's very ill," Geoffrey told them, "but I'll tell her I talked to both my daughters and that you are both well and happy, and now good-by darlings, we must stop this expensive conversation."

"Oh, wasn't that exciting?" exclaimed Pam, "but why did Pops call up?"

Miss Little explained, and Pam danced with glee.

"Now," ended Miss Little, "I want you to go and tell all the girls all about it, Pam. Don't spare Joy's blushes for she has done a very generous thing and I want the school to know about it. And, Joy," she added, "I expect you to be better than ever to live up to this. No more whistling at professors," and she smiled and her eyes twinkled.

Joy sighed happily. She knew she had been forgiven, in fact she knew that Miss Little had never been very angry.

CHAPTER XIII

JOY'S ACRE

MISS LITTLE did not leave it to Pam to circulate the good news of Joy's gift but announced it from the platform.

"I want suggestions on a way to celebrate this gift. I'll declare a holiday if one of you girls can think of a fitting way to spend it," she said.

It was Faith with her dramatic sense who finally found the winning idea.

"Only if we tell Joy she'll run a mile to get out of doing it," she said after she had explained it to Miss Little.

"Then we'll keep it a secret until next Friday," replied Miss Little, "and then I'll announce it and Joy will learn what she has to do a few minutes before she is expected to do it."

Faith left the office and returned to the post-script where she found Gloria and Pam pummeling Joy under two pillows.

"What's up?" she demanded. "Let me in on this, too."

"Joy is putting on side and we won't stand for it," laughed Gloria. "She asked me to go and get her mail for her, said she had to hurry into her gym clothes. She never would have done that yesterday now, would she?"

"I am not putting on side, don't be silly," protested Joy, "and do let me up or I'll be late for practice and Marcia will pummel me then."

"Let her up, she's the precious child of the whole school, so she is, and you mustn't hurt her," teased Faith. "Just wait until she learns what Miss Little and I are planning"—and Faith let the rest of the sentence go unfinished.

Joy didn't think anything of it, she was too intent on getting even with Pam and Gloria.

"Meet you at the door of the gym," said Gloria, as she and Faith went down stairs to change to their gym suits.

"We'll have to stop for the mail on the way out," said Joy; "it's a pity you wouldn't go after it in the first place."

"Joy Payton, I'll duck you in the pool for that," laughed Pam; "but since you are so

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insistent you go on to the gym and I'll get the letters. See you later."

Joy thought she was alone in the gym and started to bounce the ball across the floor when she heard Marcia's voice coming from the locker room.

"Both quartettes on the teams! Oh, Miss Dix, it's too good to be true."

Some girls might have pretended not to hear or coughed but not Joy. She made one dive into the next room and threw her arms around Marcia.

"I heard! I heard!" she exclaimed. "Is it really true?"

"Why, you young imp, where were you?" demanded Miss Dix, "we thought we were alone. Yes, it's true, but you mustn't tell any of the other girls."

"But can Ed Play?" asked Joy, excitedly. "I thought on account of her music she couldn't."

"Oh, Ed might let her tennis stand in the way of playing, but never her music," laughed Marcia. "Besides I've put her on the sub team and as she subs for Faith she'll never get a chance to play."

"Whom do I sub for?" demanded Joy,

dancing from one foot to the other in her excitement.

"Wait and see. Friday, thanks to you, is going to be a holiday, and that is the day that you will find a neat little note under your plate at table at breakfast, and, unless Miss Little has planned exhaustive exercises for the rest of the day, we ought to be able to get in a good practice game sometime during the day." Marcia stopped suddenly as she heard voices from the gym and with Miss Dix they went out to see who was there.

"Letters!" exclaimed Pam. "One from Bob to you and one from Joe, and I have one from Ted and Merry has one from Whisper."

Gloria came in waving a letter round her head.

"Faith's family is going to Europe, and Faith and her brother are going to spend all of Christmas vacation with me. Isn't that thrilling?" Then she saw Pam handing Joy her letters. "Did you get the mail for her after all?" she demanded.

"Well, Marsh told me to be at the gym early; she wanted to speak to me, didn't you Marsh? and anyway I'm glad I came for I know something the rest of you don't know."

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"Oh, precious child, tell us, little pet of the whole school," teased Faith.

"Now, just for that I'll never tell you," retorted Joy.

Miss Dix put her hand on Joy's shoulder. "I wanted you, imp. I told Marcia to tell you to come a minute before the rest, you and Edna."

"And I'm late as usual," exclaimed Edna as she came in the door with her gym shoes in her hand.

"Well, now that you are both here, let's go in the locker room and I'll tell you my secret," laughed Miss Dix.

In the other room she began:

"The faculty wants you two girls to help them with their tea next week. Joy to dance for us, oh, I know you can. Gloria told me all about it, and Edna to play. Will you do it for us?"

"Of course, Miss Dix, we'd love to," Edna spoke up, and Joy nodded. She was wondering if she could make Miss Sands laugh at her Russian dance.

They played basket ball for the rest of the afternoon and Pam acquitted herself so well that Marcia had no more fears where she was

concerned, but poor Merry made foul after foul and ended in a storm of tears.

"Cheer up, child," said Cissie Doran, who had been playing center against Merry. "I started in making fouls too, you just have to get out of the habit. You've got the makings of a great little basket ball player, so don't weep any more."

"How heavenly of you to say that," replied Merry. "I'll never forget it and I will try ever so hard next time and maybe I'll make the team next year."

"Maybe," said Cissie Doran, winking at Marcia as she spoke.

Cherry and Peggy and Gail had had their chances at the game, but eager as they were they were not the stuff that good basket ball players were made of. They could only hope that the four girls in their class would make their team for the honor of their room.

Joy opened her letter and read—

Dear Joy:

Ted and I are on a fair way to make the junior football team, and once you've made that you are almost sure to make the big team. I'm not bragging and the only reason we are on is cause we look so much alike and that is confusing to our oppo-

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nents. Wish you could see some of our games, but we don't play in public. Christmas is not very far off and it is lovely and warm down here. I suppose you'll be having snow soon. Give my best to Ned and Merry and Hope and Faith and your cousin Gloria, and don't forget good old Marcia, whom I love like a sister.

Best regards to yourself

Sincerely,

Bob Root.

P.S. Did you know Sweetheart Winthrop's mother was very ill? Gee! I'm glad it isn't mum.

"I never get nice, long letters like that from the twins," said Edna. "Mine are always, 'hello, sis; feeling fine; hope you are the same.' "

"That's because you're only their sister," said Marcia, "but you're lucky to have such nice brothers."

"I'm lucky, too," insisted Merry.

"Of course you are," laughed Marcia. "Anybody'd be lucky to have Spruce and Dandy for brothers."

"Come on, pet of the school," teased Edna, turning to Joy. "We've got to go and practice and I promised Miss Dix she could watch and criticize, so come on, lamb."

Joy laughed good naturedly and got up from her place on the bed. She put Bob's letter in her top bureau drawer but Joe's she kept in her sweater pocket. She was a little hurt that no one had asked to hear it.

"Now let's read our letters," suggested Pam, when they were alone in their alcoves.

"And let's see what Whisper has to say to Merry. Oh, Merry, come in and bring your letter from Whisper." Joy called across the corridor.

Merry bounced in. "Mrs. Winthrop is very ill and they sent for Stephen and he and Whisper went for a walk and he told her how he loved school, and they met Joe and he said he missed Joy, and she says Aunt Ann says Joe is doing wonders with his lessons, and that he has a general aptitude, whatever that means, and she went for a ride with daddy the other night, and Mabs kept her for dinner and"—

"Merry, will you stop!" exclaimed Joy, and Pam threw a sofa cushion at Merry's head.

"Oh, dear, I suppose I was talking a lot, but I'm so full of news, and I had a letter from Spruce, and he says Mabs has promised to take us all to the interscholastic meet in

June, and he thinks Dandy and Stephen may make the team, and he has made the dramatic club, and I'm to tell Faith but not to tell Hope, he said; and the date of their Christmas vacation is the same as ours, and we'll all meet in New York and have a great time, and we're going to have a whale of a Christmas party, and, oh, yes, Steve gets a letter from Whisper almost every day and all the boys think it's from Little Sweetheart and how they tease him."

"Merry," came Hope's voice from the corridor. "Merry, I've filled one of the tubs full of water and if you say another word I'll dump you in, and the water's cold, too."

"Does Spruce say anything about Stephen's mother being ill?" asked Joy.

"Yes; in the P.S. he says, 'Steve called home to see his sick mother. Hope it's nothing serious for a mother is a mother even if she is like Mrs. Winthrop, and I guess Steve feels pretty bad.' "

Pam opened her letter with studied deliberation.

"I'm not going to wait another minute to see what Ted has to say."

"Oh, get Ned first," said Joy. "I don't

believe she heard from the twins to-day and she likes to hear their letters."

"You go and get her, Merry," Pam said lazily.

Merry came back with Edna and Marcia and they sat on the bed and window box and helped themselves to Joy's strawberry jam.

Pam opened her letter.

Dear Pam (she began):

Thanks for your letter. I haven't much time for letter writing because I may make the junior football team. I like the idea, but I'll have to go on a diet and that won't be so good. Remember the good teas we used to have at the Colonel's when we were kids? Well good-by until Christmas, when we'll see lots of you and Joy. Give her my best and if you ever see Ned tell her she owes me a letter.

Very truly yours,

Ted Root.

"The young scamp! He owes me a letter and he knows it," said Edna, laughing.

"Let's hear what Bob has to say, Joy."

CHAPTER XIV

HILTON

WEEKS flew by on happy wings, and when this chapter opens the girls had all begun to talk of Christmas vacation. Joy's holiday had come and gone, and had been celebrated as Faith planned. On the Friday morning chosen Miss Little had announced from the platform that the whole school would march to the particular acre of land saved to Brookside through Joy's finding the stolen treasure. There they formed a hollow square and in the center of it Joy planted a birch tree.

"It probably won't grow," said Miss Little, "but if it doesn't we can plant another one in the spring."

After the planting of the tree Miss Little asked Joy to whistle for them, and Joy succeeded in coaxing a little sparrow onto her hand and holding quite a long conversation with it.

The girls were delighted.

"What does he say?" demanded Cissie Doran.

"He says," said Joy, "that he thinks the rest of the birds are quitters to leave every year, and that they don't know what they miss leaving all the good snow behind."

In the afternoon of the same day the teachers of Brookside gave a tea. Miss Doty and Miss Dix poured and Joy and Edna entertained. Joy did her Russian dance and Miss Sands kissed her, which so surprised her that she hardly heard all the flattering things that were said to her, so anxious was she to get back to the quartette and report the astonishing fact.

That night at dinner (the usual time was breakfast but it had been changed to give room to the other events) the girls of the big team and the sub team were chosen and each girl found a note under her soup plate.

It was no surprise to Joy but the rest of the quartette were wild with delight and they spent the evening discussing their prospects over a plate of sandwiches saved especially for them by Miss Dix.

The list that afterwards went up on the bulletin board read as follows:

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<i>Position</i>	<i>Big Team</i>	<i>Sub Team</i>
Forwards	Marcia Gordon	Hope Chalmers
	Faith Hunt	Edna Root
Guards	Doris Withers	Pam Hotchkiss
	Betty Kendrick	Gloria Payton
Centers	Cissie Doran	Merry Talcott
	Emily Benton	Joy Payton

"It's heavenly," exclaimed Merry, "But, goodness me, I hope I'm never expected to play."

"When do we play Hilton?" asked Pam. "I can't wait to see Rabbit Hare and Winny Betts."

"Three weeks from to-morrow," said Gloria. "Oh, do you suppose we'll ever get a chance to play? The big team is so very efficient."

"Cheer up," laughed Marcia. "Somebody may break a leg."

Then came the day when the big team was practicing in the gym alone, just passes and no one, not even Miss Dix, was there. It was the day before the game with Hilton.

"Once more, girls," said Marcia, as the big ball went up and down the line.

"Righto, that's enough for today," sang out Dora Withers and she took the ball and threw it hard at the rafters above her head. A minute later they were battling a swarm of wasps, kept warm in their hive by the hot water pipes that heated the building. They had made their nest in the summer time and had not expected to be disturbed through the long winter.

The girls beat them off as best they could but not one of them escaped being stung several times. The hornets were sleepy and they took their time about biting and made a thorough job of it.

The girls ran out into the open air and the cold wind discouraged the little insects and they dropped to the ground.

Miss Carter was kept busy for the rest of the afternoon putting on lotions and doing her best to cure the team, but by six o'clock that night they were a sorry lot. Cissie Doran limped painfully and Dora Withers had one eye closed, Marcia and Faith were bitten on the mouth and the other two of the members of the team had been stung on the neck and arms.

"May we put off the game, Miss Little?" asked Marcia as chief of sports.

"Certainly not; you have a sub team, let them play," said Miss Little, who felt that she was giving the sub team a real treat and was delighted to be able to do it. In her heart she did not think that it would harm Brookside to meet with defeat for the girls were a little too cocksure of themselves, and she liked her girls to be good losers.

"Oh, but they can't beat Hilton," gasped Marcia, "and how Rabbit Hare and Winny Betts will gloat."

"Sorry gloating if they beat only our sub team," consoled Miss Little. "Do you mean to say that all the girls are laid up? I can see you are."

"Oh, some of them are worse off than I am," said Marcia, dolefully. "Dora can't see out of her eye."

"Then put in the subs. I've no doubt they will put up a good fight, and remember you must all be good losers."

"But, Miss Little, we have never lost to Hilton," pleaded Marcia.

"Put on your sub team and do the best you can," that lady replied with finality, and

Marcia knew that the interview was over.

She went back dispirited to tell the rest of the girls. They took it in different ways. Merry was agonized, Gloria triumphant but scared, Pam and Joy were very quiet, but they began changing into their gym suits as did Hope and Edna, who went off as soon as they had changed to practice baskets.

The next day the school tried to put a brave front on the calamity and the song leaders did their best to infuse enthusiasm into the girls.

Lindy was the mascot and even his ears drooped as though he knew something was amiss.

At twelve o'clock the entire school, as was the custom, marched down to the little station and waited for the Hilton team to arrive.

Winny Betts and Rabbit Hare were the first off the train and the girls from Birchville surrounded them.

"We're only sub team, of course," said Winny, "but we hope to have a chance to play."

It was Marcia who explained the situation to the Hiltonites and they wanted to turn right around and go home.

"But, you poor lambs, it isn't fair," said

Sally Compton. "If we had brought all our subs we'd make it a sub team game, but we have only four but we'll put them on if you say so."

"Wouldn't hear of it," declared Marcia and Cissie Doran together. "Our subs will give you a pretty fight," finished Cissie, "and we'll always say we could have beaten you if we'd played you and that will be some consolation."

"Well, I must say you are good sports," said Sally, as the girls led the way up the hill to the school singing.

"They are elephants," exclaimed Gloria, suddenly discouraged.

"I'm beginning to think it's heavenly. If something would only happen to their centers so that Joy and I could play opposite Winny and Rabbit." It was Merry who spoke and her eyes snapped at the thought of the approaching battle.

"I'll never make a basket with that towering giraffe hanging over me," complained Edna. They had met the team and knew what their opponents looked like.

Joy gave a long-drawn sigh and then she doubled up her fists:

"I don't know about the rest of you but I

am going to be rough and tumble from the start; never mind the fouls, never mind going out of bounds, just play so hard every minute that they won't know where they are at."

Hope jumped up. They were in Pam's alcove waiting for the luncheon bell. They had left the big team to do the honors.

"Joy as usual has the right idea, girls; it's our only chance. We'll be on the go every second, keep jumping up and down and drive them crazy."

"Even when the ball is not near us, keep them on the jump," said Pam excitedly. "Make faces at them if necessary."

"How heavenly!" cried Merry and she screwed her face up into a horrible grimace.

"That ought to scare anybody," laughed Edna; "but, come on, we really ought to be with the subs of their team, and I am crazy to show Rabbit Hare and Winny Betts around the grounds."

They found the two girls from Birchville and escorted them to all the places of interest on the grounds, and Gloria, as Joy's cousin, told all about Joy's Acre as the new piece of ground was to be called.

Luncheon, instead of being a dreary meal,

was a very gay one and the big team decided among themselves that the younger girls did not know what they were up against or they would not be so cheerful.

The game was called at two o'clock and the two teams faced each other. Up went the ball and then things began to happen. The Brookside sub team turned into little furies; they threw the ball any way just to keep it moving and wherever they threw it there was a Brooksider to catch it and throw it somewhere else. It wasn't basket ball for no one tried to make baskets. Hilton tried to get the ball but Brookside buzzed around so furiously that they did not get a chance to throw it and they found themselves dizzy from the waving arms of the other team.

Time was called for the first half and the school was mad with excitement. No score and the game half over. Miss Little whispered to Miss Doty who was sitting beside her: "and I thought a defeat would do them good."

At the beginning of the second half Hilton put in their two sub centers and Merry and Joy faced Winny Betts and Rabbit Hare as they had hoped to do.

But all the centers in the world couldn't

stop the Brooksiders in their mad game. They buzzed around and Merry said "how heavenly!" until Winny Betts shook her out of sheer nervousness.

It was a long fifteen minutes to the exhausted girls but they kept up their game and if anybody slackened and the ball trickled down to the Hilton forwards it was beaten back by Gloria to Pam who sent it flying to Joy. There was one crucial moment in the game when Hope in her excitement ran over the line and a foul was called.

The Hilton forward took the ball and threw it, it teetered on the edge of the basket and finally dropped on the outside and a great sigh went up from the school.

The last bell found the score 0 to 0 and a tired team, so tired that they could hardly enjoy the songs that were being sung to them.

"Well," said Sally Compton, "if that's your sub team thank goodness we didn't happen in on a day when your big team were feeling well."

"And we came prepared to gloat," said Rabbit Hare.

"I blush to think of it," said Winny Betts.

"What made you think of rushing them off

their feet, Joy?" asked Cissie, for Hope had told her it was Joy's idea.

"Oh, I was thinking of the hornets and the way they attack in a crowd, and I thought it might be a good idea to try their tactics. They owed us at least an idea after what they did to the big team," said Joy.

CHAPTER XV

CHERRY AND HOPE

BROOKSIDE always gave a Christmas party before the Christmas holidays came, usually the night before, and all the girls tied their gifts on the tree and after a supper of cold turkey and cranberry sauce they sang Christmas carols to Miss Little.

The gifts were very modest and it was against the rules of the school for any girl to give a gift at the tree to any one outside of her own class, and the gift was not to cost more than twenty-five cents.

"It's two days to Christmas vac and I haven't thought of a thing to give the class," said Hope as the four girls sat in Merry's alcove.

"Neither have I," exclaimed Pam, "but I've been thinking about it, and I've come to the conclusion that the best thing we can do is for Joy and me to give gifts together and for you and Merry to do the same thing."

"But Pam, darling, what can we make in

two days that will look like anything?" Hope demanded.

"I know," said Pam; "they are easy to make and awfully effective."

"What, for pity's sake? Tell me," cried Joy.

"Some of those worsted flowers; we could make a bunch of them to match the girl's coats, and I really think they would like them better than anything we could buy for a quarter."

"Heavenly idea," said Merry, "but that doesn't help out Hopey and me. Tell us what we can do."

"Oh, I've thought of you, too; if you want to do things together why don't you get linen and make a tiny handkerchief to match their coats, too."

"I can't hemstitch," complained Hope, stifling a cough. She had a heavy cold.

"Don't have to," said Pam. "Just run the edges with embroidery cotton and make a line inside of the same color and your hanky is done."

"No," protested Merry. "I want to put a flower of french knots in the corner."

"Oh, that would be ducky!" exclaimed Joy.

"Let's get permission to go down to the village and take Miss Dix with us."

"No, she'd see what we were buying and then she wouldn't be surprised," Pam protested.

"Yes, as our class teacher she is the only one we may give a gift to; let's take Mam'selle."

"All right, you go and ask Miss Little and"—

A knock interrupted Pam and Gloria poked her nose around the corner of the alcove.

"Hello, you four," she said. "We've got permission to go to the village to buy Christmas presents, though what we are going to buy is beyond us. Don't suppose you have any brainy suggestions to offer, have you?"

Pam, as the originator of the idea, told her what they were going to do and Gloria put her hand on her shoulder.

"Did it ever strike you, my sisters, how much richer Brookside is by the coming of the Hotchkiss and Payton sisters," she began.

"Oh, let up, Glory! Do you really think it's a good idea?"

"It's marvelous; we could think of nothing downstairs. Faith even suggested buying a

really good bottle of perfume and hanging it at one end of the dormitory and dealing it out in drops. But your idea is the best, I'm off to tell the others. Meet you in the hall before the fire in ten minutes." And Gloria was gone.

Seated before the fire in a comfortable chair they found Miss Carter reading her mail and waiting to get in to Miss Little's office. Mam'selle was talking to her.

"Nous allons acheter des cadeaux, n'est pas?" she said, all smiles.

"Mais, oui, Mam'selle," said Hope and coughed.

Miss Carter looked up.

"I know one who is not *alloning*," she said, laughing. "Hope, were you really thinking of going in to the stores with a cold like that? You are crazy, child; go take off your coat and hat."

"Oh, Miss Carter, be a darling and let me go," pleaded Hope. "I'll wait outside the stores for them; honestly, I will."

"Never! Think of the crowds on Main Street;" and Miss Carter laughed, for there were never more than six people at a time on the main thoroughfare of Linden.

"Ah, please," begged Hope.

"No, and no amount of teasing can make me change my mind. Come up to the infirmary and let me swab out your throat. I know it's sore."

Hope went with her, grumbling, and the other seven, their ardor somewhat dampened by her absence, followed Mam'selle.

Back in the dormitory, her throat feeling very puckery after the treatment, Hope curled up on the window seat and started to read Silas Marner, but Nancy bored her and she was just going to find Gail and Peggy and Cherry when a tap sounded on her wardrobe door.

"Come in," she said and was very much surprised to find Retta and Grace. Her surprise was akin to astonishment as these two so seldom sought anybody out but were content to go together to the exclusion of the rest of the school.

"Oh, come in," said Hope, diving into her window box for the saltines and the peanut butter.

"We've just come in for a second," said Retta. "There is something we think you ought to know."

"Mercy, me! what is it?" asked Hope.
"You do look solemn."

"Well," began Grace; "Cherry has just twenty-five cents to spend on Christmas gifts and she is crying her eyes out in history room. She hasn't told Gail or Peggy, she's ashamed to. Never mind how we found out, but that's the case and perhaps you can do something for her. We'd be willing to lend her something but she'd never accept it."

"And you know what Miss Little thinks of borrowing," said Retta.

"Oh, that's out of the question," said Hope definitely, "but it's nice of you to think of it."

"We did it for the class; we're not overly fond of Cherry."

"You are, too," said Hope. "You are, but you won't admit it. Poor little Cherry, with her miserable stepmother! Can't you do something or suggest something?"

"No, we can't; we're busy with our own gifts and besides Cherry doesn't like us."

"Nonsense," said Hope, "But I'll go and see what I can do."

She made her way to history room and there as the girls had said, was Cherry curled up in a chair crying.

"Come on, Cherry, turn off the Niagara and let's face facts. You've a quarter to spend on Christmas gifts and that's all," Hope began. "Well, we ought to be able to think of something to make it go round."

"How did you find out?" exclaimed Cherry.

"Oh, a little bird told me," said Hope. "Don't let's worry about that."

"I can't do a thing," said Cherry, dismally; "not a thing."

"Nonsense, I was broke last year and I made up foolish rhymes to each girl and it made a great hit," said Hope. "You know, Cherry, you're not the only girl in the school who finds herself with just a quarter at Christmas time, so don't feel sorry for yourself."

"My mother would have given me anything I wanted, but now she's dead, and, oh, dear, I wish I'd never been born."

"No, you don't; stop it, there's a darling," said Hope, quietly. "Here's a hanky, dry your eyes and some day tell me all about your mother, but not to-day, you're too upset. Let's think. Can you draw?"

"No, but I can cut a little," said Cherry between sobs.

"What do you mean cut?" asked Hope.

"Silhouettes; I can sometimes get quite a good likeness," replied Cherry.

"Have you told Miss Doty?" demanded Hope.

"No," said Cherry, "she never asked me."

"Well, come along and tell her now," said Hope.

They found Miss Doty in the studio and she produced some black paper.

Hope sat for her silhouette and with quick fingers, snipping in and out with the scissors, Cherry worked.

"There," she said at last.

Miss Doty had watched her intently and almost snatched the paper away from her to look at it.

"It's not very good," said Cherry.

"Don't be absurd, child; it's excellent," exclaimed Miss Doty. "Why did you never tell me you could do this. There is a fortune in it and you are an artist at it."

"Could I really earn my living doing it?" asked Cherry.

"Of course, you absurd child," laughed Miss Doty. "Silhouettes are greatly in demand."

"Oh, then I could be independent."



Cherry worked with quick fingers.

Miss Doty put an arm about her shoulder:

“Work hard and you surely can,” she said.

“Oh, I’ll work,” promised Cherry.

“Run along now and remember what I have said,” said Miss Doty, and the two girls left.

“But,” said Cherry on the way back to the dormitory, “that doesn’t help with my Christmas gifts.”

“Cherry, you’re dumb,” said Hope.

“But”—protested Cherry.

“Of course it does,” finished Hope.

“How?” demanded Cherry.

“Make a silhouette of each of the girls in our class, paste it on white cardboard and sign your name and you’ve got the gift of the whole school.”

“Oh, Hope, do you really think so? What would I do without you? I was thinking of you when you came in to-day and wondering if I dare go to you. I don’t like you the way I do Gail and Peggy, but I always think of you when I’m in trouble. Maybe it’s your mission in life to help lame dogs over stiles.”

“Oh, cheer up,” said Hope, feeling very self-conscious.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY

THE first class, made up of the younger girls, helped the last class with the Christmas tree, and when the school filed in at six o'clock they found it ablaze with lights and the gifts that had been collected earlier in the day, hanging from every branch.

Cissie Doran was Santa Claus, in a red suit and black top boots, and a beard that completely covered her laughing face.

The two quartettes came in together.

"What do we do now?" asked Pam.

"I think it's heavenly," declared Merry. "It's twice the size of ours at home and I like the idea of hanging the gifts on the tree for decoration. Ours look very nice in their green paper and red ribbons and Pam's idea of putting a sprig of holly in each bow was really a brainstorm, wasn't it?"

"Merry," said Hope, "I promised Dandy and Spruce I'd cure you of your habit of talking too much and I haven't even made a dent.

In the first place I like to hear you prattle and in the second"—

"Never mind the second, Hokey, dear; just tell us what we do next," said Pam.

Marcia explained.

"You line up around the wall," she said, "and wait until Cissie calls your name, then you go up to the platform, receive your gift and in a few well chosen words thank the girls of your class."

"Oh, but what do you say?" demanded Merry. "I'll die of embarrassment."

Her turn came first of the second class and she walked up to the platform feeling very self-conscious. With her gifts in her arms she went down the steps, remembered she was expected to say something, turned and faced the school and the faculty.

"It's all perfectly heavenly," she said, after a minute. "Thanks ever so much."

"I would have been disappointed if Merry hadn't said just that," said Miss Doty.

"I myself call her the heavenly child," laughed Mam'selle.

Hope was called up next and she said:

"I'm ever so grateful to you all."

Then came Pam.

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"Oh, this is ever so nice; thanks a lot," she said.

Next was Joy. She couldn't think of what to say so she folded her arms as the gypsies do and said:

"Del-o-Del va Xt."

The girls all knew of Joy's gypsy adventure and they guessed she was speaking in that tongue.

"Tell us what it means, Joy," said Cissie and Joy said softly:

"God bless you."

Retta made an elaborate speech beginning "Madam Principal," and ending, "I thank you."

Grace followed suit and then came Peggy and Gail who both murmured a timid "thanks ever so much," and were in turn followed by Cherry who cried openly and made a hasty exit from the platform.

The third class was accustomed to the Brookside rite and each member made a pretty little speech.

They had supper after the distribution of the presents, cold turkey and cranberry sauce and mince pie.

The girls opened their gifts. More fuss was

made over the worsted flowers and the little handkerchiefs to match than over all but one other gift and that was Cherry's.

The silhouettes were so cleverly done that the girls were delighted and the teachers crowded around Miss Dix to see the one of her and then begged Cherry to make one of each of them.

Cherry, flustered at so much attention, found the remains of her black paper and cut out for the rest of the evening.

Miss Dix was talking to Miss Little and she learned for the first time that Cherry was going to stay at school over the Christmas holidays.

"And she is the only child staying this year. I'm afraid she'll be lonely," said Miss Little.

Miss Dix took a sudden resolve; why not ask Cherry to come home with her? Somehow she couldn't bear to think of the child alone at Brookside with just Miss Little for company. She slipped out of the room and returned in a few minutes with a note written on the school paper.

She handed it to Cissie with whispered instructions. Cissie pinned it to the Christmas tree and then called Cherry.

"Oh, Cherry, there's a letter you forgot to take; it's on the tree for you, come and get it," she said.

Cherry looked up. She was finishing the rather peculiar features of Miss Sands and she stopped at the chin.

"For me?" she exclaimed. "What can it be?"

Cissie handed her the note.

"Better open it," she said. "It's something nice, I'll bet."

Cherry tore it open. On a Christmas card was written:

Cherry dear:

Come home and spend Christmas with me and help me cheer up my mother and my invalid brother. We'd love to have you.

Marie Dix.

Cherry almost went out of her head for joy.

"Oh, Miss Little, may I go? May I?" she demanded.

"Why, of course, dear child," Miss Little replied smiling.

"Cherry, you never told us," exclaimed Gail and Peggy. "We'd have invited you to our houses, you know we would."

"Christmas isn't a time to ask strangers to

your home," said Cherry wistfully, "and your mothers want you to themselves. Maybe I can help if I go to Miss Dix's. She says she has an invalid brother."

"Crazy kid," returned Gail. "When you're not in the dumps you're the best company ever. My mother would adore you."

"Perhaps," said Peggy, "Miss Dix will spare you for a week-end." And the three girls went off to talk about it.

"Thank goodness for that," sighed Hope. "I'd have taken her home with me if she had told me. She's a plucky little thing in some ways and Miss Dix is a darling."

The rest of the girls agreed with her.

After supper they played games, guessing games for the most part, and in the questions she put to the girls Miss Little cleverly found out how much they had learned during the half year.

They ended up with an old-fashioned spelling bee and Gloria, much to everybody's surprise, won it.

"Now then put on your coats and hats and we will have our carols," said Miss Little.

Warmly dressed they all went out in the cold, crisp air and marched down to the

doctor's house and sang "God rest ye, merry gentlemen" under his window. Then they went down farther into the village and sang before their good friend the druggist and the rector of the tiny church. Then they came home and found Katie waiting with a cup of hot soup for each girl.

They all filed past Miss Little and said good-night and wished her a merry Christmas.

The next morning there was snow and the girls greeted it with joy.

"A white Christmas, Daddy will be pleased," said Gloria. "Hope, I wish you were going to be in Birchville over Christmas day. It's a shame you can't be there for Merry's party."

"I know, but I can't leave Wally and Aunt Selina," said Hope, "but I'll be there right after Christmas and we'll make up for the good time we lost, won't we, Merry?"

"Of course," exclaimed Merry, "but I wish you were going to be there Christmas day. Just think of it, breakfast at the Roots', dinner at the Hotchkiss's and then supper with us."

"I know, but I simply couldn't leave Aunt Selina," said Hope.

"I wrote Mabs that it wouldn't be perfect without you," said Merry.

"Well, cheer up, or you'll have me in tears and that would be silly on such a lovely day," declared Hope.

"Come on, it's time to go out and wait for the carriages," said Marcia calling from the head of the stairs.

Cherry went by carrying Miss Dix's suit case.

"Write me a letter during the hols, Cherry, and let me know what kind of a time you are having," called Hope, "will you?"

"Oh, I'd love to write to you; would you really like to hear from me."

"Good enough, then do it," said Hope. "Good-by Retta. You go home by motor with Grace, don't you? Hope you have a merry Christmas."

"Thanks ever so much, president," laughed Retta. "We are going to four dances."

"Oh, how heavenly," sighed Merry. "I've never been to a dance in my life. Of course parties are different."

"Well, perhaps these are what you'd call parties, but Grace and I call them dances," replied Retta.

"Have a good time," said Joy, and she shook hands with both of the girls.

"Do you know, Retta, I almost wish we were going on the train with the crowd. I like the girls this year," said Grace.

"Yes, they are nice but imagine calling a dance a party," replied Retta.

The carriages from the station arrived and the two quartettes hopped in two of them and were soon away to the station singing.

The train ride down to New York was a lark and when they arrived their spirits were high. The Penn station was packed with people and at first the girls saw only a blur of faces. Then Merry recognized Dandy and Spruce, and Edna and Joy saw the Root twins.

"There's Wally, bless his heart," said Hope, and she flew to her small brother, resplendant in his uniform, who said:

"For Pete's sake, don't kiss me before all the fellows."

"Where are all the families?" asked Marcia.

"Where's Joe?" asked Joy.

"And Whisper?" demanded Merry.

"My dear little sister, we didn't want Birchville to look like the deserted village, so we left

some of the folks at home to keep house," said Dandy, and Spruce added seriously to Joy:

"We've just got in from school, you see, and we thought it would be a stunt to come and meet you alone. I guess the reason Joe is not here is because Stephen's mother died yesterday and he wouldn't want to leave him."

"Oh," said Joy, "how sad! Poor, poor Stephen."

"Yes, we must all be extra nice to him these hols," said Dandy.

"Come along, Wally, we must start for home," said Hope, "though I hate to leave."

"Not so fast, old lady," said Wally. "We go with the crowd. Aunt Selina is with Mrs. Talcott for Christmas, think of that."

"Oh, I knew this morning that something nice was going to happen," said Hope.

"How simply heavenly," exclaimed Merry.

CHAPTER XVII

CHRISTMAS DOINGS

“**W**HERE’S Stephen’s father, then?” asked Joy. She and Pam were with Geoffrey and Flora in the studio just before dinner, and they were waiting for the Colonel, Joe and Stephen to come. Flora had just told them that Stephen was staying with the Colonel and Joy naturally asked the question.

“He has gone away to pull himself together,” answered Geoffrey. “It was a great shock losing his wife, and he didn’t want to see anybody for a while.”

“Not even Stephen?” demanded Pam.

“Not even Stephen,” replied Flora. “But here they come; remember, be extra nice to Stephen.”

“Treat him as though nothing had happened,” said Geoffrey. “That will be the best way.”

The Colonel entered the room followed by the two boys. Joe’s face was alight. He had

seen Joy for a few minutes at the station but this was better still.

"Joy, it is so good to think the same bit of sky covers us once more," he said in his low soft voice.

"It is heavenly to be back and to have you here, Joe," said Joy.

The bond of friendship was as strong as ever between these two. Joe would always think of Joy as his adored little *gajo* and Joy would always look up to Joe as her guide and friend.

Dinner was a happy meal, for the girls soon forgot Stephen's loss and treated him as they had always done—as one of the crowd.

In the evening they sat around and talked, Geoffrey Hotchkiss getting from each one of them his or her experiences through the past half year. He was more than proud of his two daughters and enjoyed their eager enthusiasm.

The guests left early and Joy saw Stephen kiss her mother good-night and her eyes filled with tears at the sight.

The next morning, after a hard snow the night before, was just made for coasting, and the entire village of Birchville went out to the

club hill and coasted until it was time to meet Gloria, who was coming with her family to spend the holidays with Pam and Joy.

Most of the crowd went to the station to meet her and it was not long before they had her out of her traveling suit into sport clothes and out on the hill with them.

That night was Christmas Eve and they had a big party at the club, to which the younger generation was invited to come and stay until ten o'clock.

They had a good time for there was dancing, and Gloria found herself very popular with the boys, especially Spruce Talcott. Ten o'clock came all too soon but there was the next day to look forward to and they all trooped home to get, as Marcia explained it, their "beauty sleep."

Faith Hunt was staying with the Roots and as they walked down the hill on their way home she had a sudden idea.

"Let's go back and hide the ice cream. They didn't give us any and we needn't hide it very far."

The Root twins agreed at once and with Joe to help (Stephen was, of course, not there, but had insisted on Joe's going) they went around

to the back of the clubhouse and rolled the three containers of ice cream out of sight behind a door of the woodhouse.

"Now let's go and say good-night to Stephen," suggested Ted.

Stephen was in bed but he got up and dressed and came down. He looked worn and tired and as though he had been crying. Whisper, who was with them, made an unexpected suggestion.

"Let's make Stephen some fudge, he loves it so," she said softly.

"Grand idea," exclaimed Ted Root and in the Colonel's kitchen they made it and, of course, they had to sit around and eat it, so that by the time the last crumb was gone it was nearly twelve o'clock.

Gloria met them on their return. She was ready for bed and she looked frightened.

"Where have you been?" she demanded. "I've just looked up the number of the club to call Aunt Flora. I've been home perfect hours; tell me this minute where you were, you young imps."

Pam and Joy told and as they were describing the making of the fudge the telephone rang sharply.

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It was Geoffrey and in a voice that he fondly hoped was severe he demanded to know where the ice cream was.

Pam, who had answered the phone, told him, giggling, and he rang off with the parting message: "You all go to bed this minute."

Christmas Day greeted them with lowering skies. Pam and Joy were down early to see their gifts that were banked in the fireplace. The tree this year was going to be on the table at dinner as a decoration, so it was of necessity much smaller than the one the girls usually had.

Pam's and Joy's gifts were for the most part alike.

There was a basket of tiny pearls from Pops, a fitted bag from Mummy, two framed sketches from Whisper, skates from Gloria's father and mother, a dozen silk handkerchiefs from Gloria herself, each embroidered in a corner with their names, a pair of woolen stockings from Miss York and a fountain pen in jade green from Amy Strong.

There was hardly time to look at and enjoy all these gifts before it was time to start for the Roots' for breakfast.

The whole family was waiting for them in

the hall and as a great and welcome surprise Marcia Gordon's mother was sitting in a big chair before the fire.

The Talcotts had arrived first and there was quite a gathering about the big Christmas tree.

Joe, the Colonel and Stephen came last and the boys both wore new wrist watches, the Colonel's gift. Stephen looked very unhappy and tried to hide it under a smile, but everybody knew it was for his absent father that he was grieving.

Breakfast was a merry meal, everyone helped himself to food from the sideboard and jokes were bandied across the table.

In the middle of the meal came a sudden knock at the door and a man's voice was heard in answer to the maid's inquiry.

Stephen's head went up and he jumped from his place.

"Dad," he exclaimed.

"My boy," said Mr. Winthrop.

They met in the hall and no one saw what took place. In a few minutes the father stood in the doorway his arm around his son's shoulder and said with a smile:

"Anything to eat for a hungry man?"

After that the joy was complete and every-

one had such a good time that it looked as though breakfast would never end.

Flora and Mrs. Payton excused themselves and the three girls followed them. They had to go home and fix the table for dinner.

"Come, too, Joe, and help me with the flowers," invited Flora and Joe with a satisfied look at Stephen who had eyes for no one but his father, left the table.

Once in the Hotchkiss studio Gloria exclaimed excitedly: "Aunt Flora, it looks just like a banquet," and indeed the long table covered by its white cloth looked as though a banquet was about to take place.

A Christmas tree stood in the center and from it ran red ribbons to every place. Lying on the branches of the tree were gifts tied to the end of each.

Joe arranged the poinsettias in their bank of green fern down the length of the table and the whole gave a most Christmassy effect.

At two o'clock the guests began to arrive and by two-thirty they were all seated at the table and ready to pull their ribbons.

The girls found shoe buckles and the boys cuff links and everybody was delighted with his gift.

The real fun of the day came at the Talcotts's party that night when Mr. Talcott appeared as Santa Claus and made fun with all the younger people.

They ended the party as usual by going to church singing Christmas carols on the way and coming home to a cold turkey supper, which they ate leisurely. By ten o'clock everyone was thoroughly tired out and ready for bed.

Had you looked in the different living rooms you would have seen the following groups:

At the Talcotts's house everything was disarranged and papers and caps were strewn on the floor.

"Some party, I'll say," said Dandy, as he put his arm around his mother's waist and hugged her.

"Yes and my little Mabs was the best of hostesses," said Spruce, linking his mother's free arm in his.

"My two angel sons," said Mabs Talcott; "you can always be depended upon to say the right thing."

"Well, I think my daddy made a heavenly Santa Claus," said Merry, and her father tilted up her chin and kissed her.

"What does my adopted daughter think?" he asked turning to Hope.

"Oh, there's only one Santa Claus in the world and you're he," replied Hope. "Isn't that true, Aunt Selina?"

"Indeed it is," Miss Chalmers agreed. "I should think the real Santa Claus would feel very jealous."

"This is the most heavenly Christmas I ever spent and I know it's because we are all together. Hope and Aunt Selina and oh, Mabs, promise me we can always have Christmas just like it was to-day for ever and ever and"—

"Merry," thundered Spruce and Dandy together.

At the Roots's house Edna sat on the arm of her father's chair and stroked his head. She knew the boys had wanted new skates for Christmas and that they had not gotten them and were disappointed.

"What's my darling daughter want?" asked Mr. Root fondly.

"Skates for the twins, Daddy," whispered Edna. "I can't bear to have them unhappy on Christmas day."

"Nonsense," stormed Mr. Root. "The

skates they have are plenty good enough."

"But they aren't, daddy, darling, and I can't bear to think that my brothers haven't skates as good as Wally's, for instance. Be a darling and write them each a check and I'll put it under their pillow to-night and that will make me so happy."

"Mother," called Mr. Root, "call your daughter away from me. She's tempting me to do what I know is ridiculous and you know I never could say 'no' to her."

"What are you teasing Daddy for, a pair of high heel slippers?" asked Mrs. Root, coming in from the other room with her arm around Faith.

"Of course she isn't; does she want high heel slippers?" asked Mr. Root.

"Yes, but I didn't think she needed them," answered her mother.

"Well, if I'm to shell out for new skates for the boys I guess she can have her slippers," retorted Mr. Root. Nothing half way, ever suited him.

"Edna, darling, have you been teasing for something for the twins? I might have known it wasn't for yourself," and Mrs. Root stroked Edna's hair with loving fingers.

"Mother," said Mr. Root, "you don't half appreciate your daughter."

Needless to say Edna had two checks to put under her brothers' pillows that night, and when she suggested bed both boys knew that something mysterious was afoot.

Ted found his check first and flew to Edna.

"You did it, you did it, you peach, you hum-dinger, you one sister in a thousand," he exclaimed.

"One sister in a million you mean," cried Bob, flourishing his check and embracing Edna in a tremendous bear hug.

"Hope wouldn't have sense enough to get me what I wanted like that," said Wally truthfully.

"I wish I had a brother," said Faith.

Over at the Colonel's Joe and Stephen were sitting quietly listening to Stephen's father and the Colonel talk about the war.

"I guess I'll have to be a soldier when I come to the age when I can choose, or it will break his heart."

"What will you do about your violin?" asked Stephen. "For myself I'm going to be a detective."

"My violin," said Joe sadly; "don't talk

about that please. You see I couldn't break his heart."

Stephen and his father went up to bed and the Colonel came over to Joe and said with gruff tenderness.

"This has been my happiest Christmas for many a long day, boy, thanks to you, and I want you to remember this: your violin must come first with you, no matter what I say. I'm going to be very proud of you when you get to be a great performer."

"You wouldn't rather I'd be a soldier, sir?" asked Joe.

"Never, my boy," replied the Colonel, "for above all things I want you to be happy."

Honor Hare was spending Christmas night with the Betts and she combed out her short bobbed hair strenuously.

"My! but I'm glad I came to Birchville to live," she said.

"So am I glad you came," said Winny, already in bed and very sleepy.

"They don't like us quite as well as they like each other, but that's because we don't go to Brookside and it's perfectly natural."

"Well, I'm not sorry about that, Hilton forever!" said Winny.

"Yes, but at the same time," said Honor, "three cheers for Brookside."

In the Hotchkiss's home they were all sitting around the fire.

"What a Christmas," said Pam. "I got everything I asked for and I am perfectly happy only I wish every day were Christmas."

"I know," said Gloria, "it's over so soon, but it's something to think about, and I don't believe anyone at Brookside had a better time than we did."

"Why don't you call Whisper up and ask her what she liked best during the day?" suggested Pops. "I'd really like to know. She's such a little mouse."

Joy went to the telephone in the next room and came back a minute later.

"Sniffs says Whisper is fast asleep but that she asked her what she liked best and she said the minute Mr. Winthrop walked in to breakfast this morning."

"Bless her heart!" said Mr. Hotchkiss.

"What did you like best?" asked Flora suddenly of Joy.

"Oh," said Joy laughing, "that's my secret."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GHOST PARTY

“**D**O you think you passed?”

It was examination week at Brookside and the above phrase was on all lips.

The quartette met in the corridor where the bulletin board flaunted the time for the exams for the following day.

Pam asked the question and Joy answered:

“No, how do I know the name of the king who was called the Lionhearted?” she said, crossly. “There were so many of them.”

“Oh, I knew that, it was Richard,” Pam said, “but bless me if I remember the date of the battle of Hastings.”

“1066,” said Joy. “I got that one.”

Hope who loved history said she answered both questions and drew a wail of despair from the rest of her class.

“I put in 800 as the date of the battle of Hastings,” said Retta. “I thought that was near enough.”

"Well, who met whom on the field of the cloth of gold?" demanded Merry.

"Oh, don't talk about it any more," said Cherry. "It's over and done with and I expect we all failed."

"Cheerful little thing, you are," said Hope. "I bet we all got through with flying colors."

"Coming to the gym, Cherry?" asked Gail.

"No, I'm going to write Mr. Dix a letter and tell him all about the exams; he's ever so interested. Oh, girls, he's such a darling, so strong and fine and yet he can't walk. And he's so brave he never complains; oh, I just adore him."

"Well he must be nice if he is Miss Dix's brother," said Peggy.

"Come on, Retta, we've got to cram for algebra," said Grace, and as usual the two girls went off together.

"I should think they'd get tired of each other," said Hope. "Why I'd even get tired of Merry if I never saw any of the rest of you."

"Thanks, a lot," said Merry, and she pretended to be hurt.

"Now none of that," said Hope, putting her arm around Merry's neck and bending her

forward till her bobbed hair touched the ground.

"Pax, pax!" Merry called, and Hope let her up.

"Then don't get sarcastic with me again," she said.

"I won't, I'll be honest with you this time," said Merry. "I know I'd be so sick of you if I never saw Pam and Joy that I'd probably murder you some dark night."

"That's better," said Hope. "Now that we're friends again, I say we all go to the gym and have some basket ball."

They were all talking in the corridor by the music stand and just as they started to move away Edna came up with a load of music under her arm.

"You're wanted, your whole class, in Miss Little's office," she said severely. "What have you been up to?"

"Why, nothing," answered Joy and Pam, "unless it's untidy alcoves and I know Miss Dix wouldn't report us."

"Of course, she wouldn't," said Cherry.

"Well, it's something important so you'd better hurry and get it over with," said Edna.

"Somebody go get Retta and Grace," said

Hope. "Here, I'll go, but for the life of me I can't think what we've done."

"Maybe we all flunked French yesterday," suggested Merry.

Hope returned with Retta and Grace and the entire class set out for Miss Little's office, each one with a clear conscience but feeling most uncomfortable none the less.

"You'd think," said Joy on the way down stairs, "that Miss Little never wanted us for anything but to scold us."

"Well, Ned seemed to think it was something we had done," said Pam.

They came to Miss Little's door and knocked timidly.

"Come in," came in brisk tones from within.

"Oh, it's my nice second class is it?" said Miss Little, when she saw who it was. "Come in and sit down wherever you can find room. On the floor if necessary."

The girls sighed with relief; this was to be no lecture they felt sure.

"I've just received the reports from the examinations, all but history"——

Once more the girls began to feel nervous.

—"and I am delighted to hear that you all reached a high standard, higher, I regret to

say, than the seniors who should have set the record."

Another sigh of relief.

"Now what I want the entire school to do is to forget exams entirely, and I am looking to you to give a party that will make them forget. Something new in the way of parties that will make every one laugh all the time. I can't give you any suggestions. That you'll have to do for yourself, but remember, I want everyone to laugh and forget the strains of this last week."

The girls were dismissed and they walked on air. Usually the after exam party was given by the last class, but this year it had pleased Miss Little to choose them and they felt the honor keenly.

They went to Joy's and Pam's alcoves, pulled back the curtains and all began to think.

"We ought to have our class teacher here," said Hope. "Cherry, go and get Miss Dix; tell her it's very important."

"I'll be mysterious," said Cherry.

She succeeded so well that Miss Dix came into the alcove immediately, her face showing concern.

Hope explained matters to her and she clapped her hands in delight.

"I knew I was class teacher for the brightest class in the school," she said. "Now to think up something really novel."

"I have an idea," said Merry. "It's not a very good one but it may lead to something."

"Let's have it," said half a dozen voices.

"Let's give a ghost party, everyone to arrive dressed as a ghost and we'll go on from there," and Merry sat back conscious that she had started something.

"Good idea, Merry," said Miss Dix, "and we could have a hole-in-the-blanket party at the same time."

They made their plans for the rest of the afternoon and they kept absolutely silent about the whole affair.

The next day was algebra exam and they all felt that they passed with flying colors.

"There's only history that we might have flunked in and even then our standard will be high," said Joy. But the history papers were returned and although the marks were nothing to brag about still they all got through.

Cherry made a silhouette of a ghost and lettered under it were the words:

COME ONE, COME ALL, TO A
FESTIVE GATHERING OF GHOSTS.
COME DRESSED AS A SPECTRE
AND MEET THE KING GHOST

On the night of the party a long line of white robed figures wound round the assembly hall in a fantastic dance led by Joy and then each one went up to meet the King of Ghosts or the chief goblin. This was Hope and she sat on a throne under a green light and held out a hand to each of her subjects; as they shook it the hand came away from the arm and remained in their grasp.

There were many shrieks and much laughter and then the blanket party began.

A blanket was strung up across the room and five girls went behind it at a time. Holes were cut in it and just their eyes peered through, their feet showed below the curtain and one hand was held above it.

When a girl was guessed correctly she came out from behind the curtain and joined the guessers.

They had great fun and finally only one girl was left behind the blanket and it seemed as though no one could guess her.

"Who under the sun is it?" demanded Pam. "I know I've seen that hand somewhere but I give up when I try to think where."

"I know, who can it be?" replied Joy.

At last they organized the whole school and filed them past one at a time.

"It must be one of the faculty, all of the school is here," said Hope excitedly.

"It isn't Miss Dix and there's Mam'selle and Miss Doty and"—began Joy.

"It isn't one of the faculty; they are all here," said Faith. "Who under the sun can it be?"

The whole school was talking about it and wondering who the stranger was when at a given word the blanket dropped and Miss Little appeared before their astonished eyes.

"You," exclaimed Hope.

"How heavenly," exclaimed Joy, "you've simply made the party."

"I'm glad I helped," said Miss Little with a twinkle in her eye. "It's been quite the nicest party of the year, but girls, think of none of you recognizing my hand, and you've seen it raised so many times."

"I know," exclaimed Joy, "but we just couldn't think of you there somehow."

"Think of it! The most important person in the room and we didn't miss her."

"We'll start lessons in observation to-morrow," said Miss Little.

The quartettes talked it over, over the refreshments.

"Miss Little has never honored a class more in the whole history of the school," said Marcia solemnly.

"Think what you'll be when you are last class girls," said Edna.

"Think of next year with you for last class what a good time we'll have."

"Next term will fly, the summer will fly and we'll be back before we know it," Faith whispered, as if struck for the first time by the flight of time.

"Yes," said the rest of the girls. "School days will be over before we know it and then what shall we do?"

"Go on having a heavenly time at Birchville," said Merry, the philosopher.

CHAPTER XIX

LAST DAYS

THE second term at any school is apt to drag and it seems a long way between Christmas and Easter, but this year there were so many good times and so many week-ends at home that the time flew and before they realized it the girls were facing the Easter vacation.

It was not such a happy one as Christmas had been because Gloria and Faith and Hope were not there and the girls had a chance to realize how much they missed them.

Two events marked the holidays, the Mother and Daughter luncheon and the Father and Son dinner. Everyone made speeches and of them all Flora's was the sweetest for she said she didn't know which of her daughters she loved the better.

Back at school with June in sight and the final examinations and commencement made time fly.

The Colonel and Joe and Whisper came up

to see Joy and Pam and they took them all over the grounds and showed them Joy's Acre and the caves.

Miss Little had a long talk with Joy about her future, and she seemed to think that it was a pity that Joy did not have to earn her own living so that she could dance through life giving other people pleasure.

The last class gave a play, "The School for Scandal" and Faith was in it and she made so much of a hit that her father, a business man who had little time for his motherless daughter, said if her mind was made up she might go on the stage and that he would give her an allowance when she left school. Faith walked on air for a week and talked of becoming another Maud Adams.

Each class entertained the last class and the second and third classes joined forces and gave them a hay ride. They drove to an inn about ten miles away and had a royal spread and sang all the way home.

With the spring, basket ball was forgotten and tennis took its place. Edna and Marcia won all the cups in the school and looking for new worlds to conquer they challenged Hilton to a match and were badly beaten, much to

Mr. Root's disgust. He had come all the way to see his darling win and to see her lose disgusted him. Not so Mrs. Root, who was prouder of her daughter than ever when she saw what a good loser she was. Mr. Root was not disgusted with Edna and Marcia, of course, but with the Hilton girls for daring to beat them.

Merry and Edna were the only ones allowed to go to the boys' commencement, because, until they were seniors, they were not supposed to have anyone but relatives there.

They came back brimming with accounts of it and a promise that next year Dandy and Spruce would invite both quartettes to the dance.

Commencement at Brookside was the pretty affair that it had always been, and Miss Little spoke with pride of her coming last class and the class that had won all honors in study for that year, which much to their surprise, was the second class.

"Altogether it's been a wonderful year," said Marcia, as she stood with the two quartettes waiting for the carriages to take them to the station.

"And next year Hilton has to play us at

tennis again and give us our chance at revenge," Edna replied, swinging her racket.

"Why not this summer?" asked Gloria. "I heard Honor Hare say she was going to invite those two girls to Birchville and I know Daddy would just love to give a cup."

"Oh, good idea, and ask us down for it, will you, Ned, and perhaps we can give a play at the club for the flood sufferers." Faith was already rehearsing it in her own mind.

"Oh, we mean to have house parties," laughed Marcia.

"Let's just make our mothers let us go to the same place this summer," said Merry. "It would be heavenly all at the same seaside resort, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, and think of the fun we could have sailing," said Hope.

"The quartettes stay together," said Pam.

"There's no use worrying," said Joy. "I heard mummy say to Mrs. Root that those children must never be separated."

"Here come the carriages," said Faith. "One last cheer for Brookside!" and it was given with a will as the girls turned a bend in the road and left the school drowsing after a strenuous year, in the sunshine.

CHAPTER XX

CONCLUSION

“**W**ELL, are my daughters happy or are they sad?” laughed Geoffrey Hotchkiss as Pam and Joy came into the studio to tell him luncheon was ready.

“Oh, happy,” gasped Pam and Joy, surprised at the question.

“Then it’s been a good year and Brookside is all right, eh?” he went on.

“The very happiest,” said Pam.

“And do you know?” said Joy as her mother entered the room, “I think Pam and I are the happiest of all Brooksidiers. I don’t know just why.”

“Oh, I do,” exclaimed Flora, with one of her rare smiles. “It’s because you’re sisters, don’t you see?”

“Of course,” said Joy and Pam together.

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